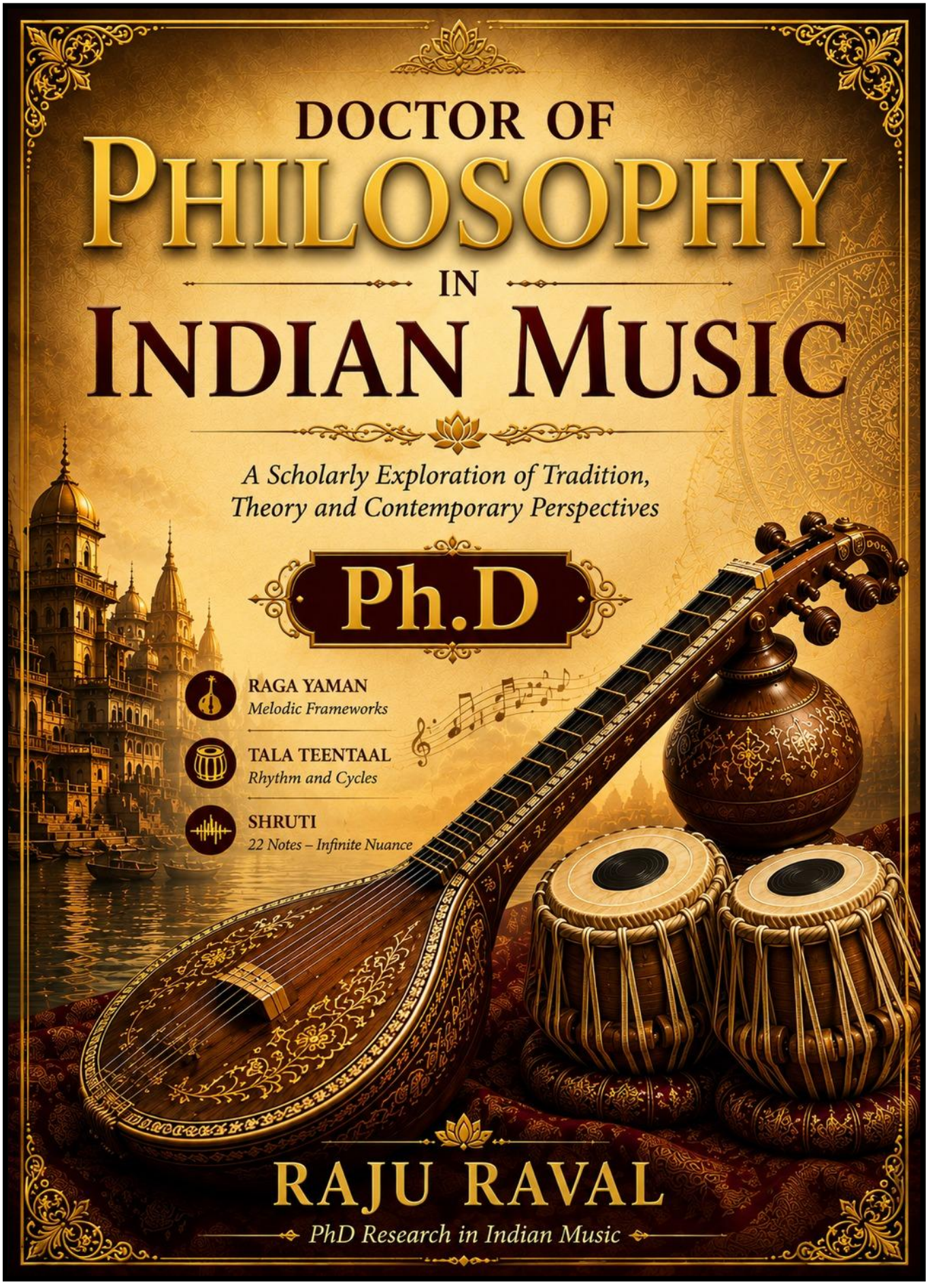
DOCTOR OF
PHILOSOPHY
IN
INDIAN MUSIC
A Scholarly Exploration of Tradition, Theory and Contemporary Perspectives
Ph.D
RAGA YAMAN
Melodic Frameworks
TALA TEENTAAL
Rhythm and Cycles
SHRUTI
22 Notes – Infinite Nuance
RAJU RAVAL
PhD Research in Indian Music

ABSTRACT

This doctoral thesis undertakes a comprehensive examination of Hindustani Classical Music as a living cultural institution, tracing its historical roots from the ancient Vedic period through the Mughal synthesis to its contemporary practice in urban India and the global diaspora. Employing a multidisciplinary methodology that draws on ethnomusicology, cultural sociology, postcolonial theory, and oral history, this research interrogates the ways in which Hindustani Classical Music has functioned not merely as an aesthetic system but as a vehicle of social identity, caste negotiation, spiritual practice, and national belonging.

The thesis is structured around five thematic pillars. The first examines the historical formation of the gharana system and its role in transmitting both musical knowledge and social hierarchies across generations. The second analyses the colonial encounter and the complex processes by which Hindustani music was both threatened and paradoxically revitalised through nationalist discourse in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The third pillar explores the democratisation of the tradition through All India Radio, the gramophone, digital streaming, and institutional music education, examining how these technologies of dissemination have reshaped the social base of the art form. The fourth investigates gender dynamics within the tradition, focusing on the contested position of women performers from the tawaif culture of the Mughal courts to the contemporary concert stage. The fifth and final pillar situates Hindustani music within global cultural flows, examining fusion movements, international pedagogy, and the politics of world music classification.

Primary fieldwork was conducted across Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata, Varanasi, and Jaipur over a period of eighteen months, incorporating sixty-three semi-structured interviews with musicians, musicologists, students, patrons, and policy makers. Analysis of archival materials held at the Sangeet Natak Akademi, the British Library, and the Lucknow Kathak Kendra supplemented the ethnographic data.

The central argument advanced is that Hindustani Classical Music occupies a paradoxical social position in contemporary India: simultaneously venerated as the pinnacle of high culture and marginalised by market forces; claimed as Hindu heritage and shaped by centuries of Sufi and Islamic influence; performed by hereditary professionals yet increasingly practised by upper-middle-class amateurs. This paradox is not a sign of crisis but of vitality. The thesis concludes that the resilience of the tradition lies precisely in its capacity to absorb social contradictions, to serve multiple communities simultaneously, and to sustain a mode of deep

listening and intergenerational transmission that constitutes a counter-cultural practice within the attention economy of the twenty-first century.

Keywords: Hindustani Classical Music, gharana, raga, social identity, cultural transmission, postcolonialism, gender, globalisation, ethnomusicology, India.

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My deepest thanks are owed to my supervisor, whose intellectual rigour, practical wisdom, and unfailing encouragement shaped every chapter of this work. The interdisciplinary seminars at the Department of Music and Performing Arts provided the collegial environment in which many of the arguments developed here were first tested and refined.

I am indebted to the librarians and archivists at the Sangeet Natak Akademi in New Delhi, the National Archives of India, the Bhatkhande Music Institute in Lucknow, and the South Asia Collection at the British Library for their expert assistance. Portions of the fieldwork were made possible by a doctoral research fellowship whose institutional support I gratefully acknowledge.

To my family, who lived with this project as intimately as I did: this work is dedicated to you, and to the memory of my grandmother, who first placed a record of Pandit Bhimsen Joshi on the turntable and changed everything.

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GLOSSARY OF KEY TERMS

Alap

The meditative, unmeasured opening section of a raga performance in which the musician introduces the melodic grammar of the raga through slow, expansive exploration without rhythmic accompaniment. The alap is considered the most intellectually demanding portion of the performance and may last from a few minutes to over an hour.

Bandish

A fixed composition set to a tala, forming the structured core of a khyal or dhrupad performance. The bandish provides a point of departure and return for improvisation.

Dhrupad

The oldest extant form of Hindustani vocal music, characterised by its austere, meditative character, use of Sanskrit texts, and association with the Dagarvani and Darbhangha gharanas. Dhrupad is considered the foundational genre from which later forms developed.

Gharana

A hereditary school or lineage of musicians sharing a common stylistic identity, pedagogical philosophy, and ancestral lineage. The word derives from the Hindi ghar (house or home). The gharana system is the primary institutional form through which Hindustani musical knowledge has been transmitted across generations.

Guru-Shishya Parampara The master-disciple relationship that forms the basis of traditional music transmission. The shishya (student) typically resides in the household of the guru (master), serving him in daily life as well as receiving musical instruction in an intensive, personalised, and lifelong relationship.

Khyal

The dominant form of Hindustani vocal music, characterised by its emphasis on improvisation, ornamental elaboration, and emotional expressivity. Developed from dhrupad under Mughal influence, khyal became the central vehicle for classical vocal performance from the eighteenth century onwards.

Raga

The melodic framework of Hindustani music, specifying the notes, their characteristic movements, ornaments, emotional associations, and temporal properties. A raga is not a scale but a personality — a set of musical tendencies and possibilities that the performer realises through improvisation.

Tala

The rhythmic cycle that organises Hindustani music. Talas vary from three beats (the rarely used Tivra) to sixteen beats (the ubiquitous Teentaal) and beyond, each with its internal division, characteristic gestures, and emotional character.

Tawaif

A term for courtesean performers in the Mughal and princely court traditions who were highly trained in music, dance, poetry, and etiquette. The tawaif culture was a central institution of elite cultural life before colonial legislation and nationalist reform movements marginalised and ultimately suppressed it.

Thumri

A lighter, emotionally expressive form of Hindustani vocal music, associated with romantic and devotional texts, flexible treatment of raga grammar, and origins in the kathak dance tradition of Lucknow. Thumri occupies an intermediate position between classical and semi-classical music.

Ustad / Pandit

Honorific titles for master musicians. Ustad (from Persian/Urdu, meaning master) is used for Muslim musicians; Pandit (from Sanskrit, meaning learned one) is used for Hindu musicians. These titles carry deep social significance within the tradition.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION — MUSIC, SOCIETY, AND THE QUESTION OF TRANSMISSION

Sound does not merely reflect society; it constitutes it. This deceptively simple proposition, which can be traced through the sociological aesthetics of Max Weber, the cultural theory of Pierre Bourdieu, and the ethnomusicology of Bruno Nettl and Martin Clayton, provides the animating premise of this thesis. In the case of Hindustani Classical Music — the art music of North India — the relationship between sound and society is exceptionally dense, historically layered, and

analytically rich. Over more than a millennium, this tradition has been shaped by Vedic cosmology, Sufi mysticism, Mughal court culture, Hindu nationalism, colonial modernity, the mass media of the twentieth century, and the digital platforms of the twenty-first. It has been performed by hereditary Muslim musicians in the lantern-lit salons of Lucknow, transmitted in hushed early-morning riyaz sessions in the homes of Jaipur ustads, broadcast across the subcontinent by All India Radio, recorded in Abbey Road studios with the Beatles, streamed on Spotify by listeners in São Paulo and Stockholm, and taught in music schools from Vancouver to Vienna. To understand Hindustani Classical Music is to understand something essential about the way culture travels across time, across social boundaries, and across the globe.

This thesis does not attempt to provide a comprehensive history of Hindustani music in the conventional musicological sense, though historical narrative is necessarily central to its argument. Nor is it primarily a technical analysis of raga grammar or performance practice, though an understanding of the music's internal structure is indispensable to any account of its social meaning. Rather, this is a study in cultural sociology and ethnomusicology: a sustained inquiry into the social conditions that have produced this tradition, the social functions it has served, and the social transformations through which it has passed. The central question animating the research is deceptively simple: what does it mean to be part of a tradition? And its corollary: what happens to that meaning when the social conditions that sustained the tradition are radically altered?

These questions have an obvious urgency in the contemporary Indian context. The economic liberalisation of 1991 and its cultural aftermath have produced a society in which the relationship between high art and mass entertainment has been fundamentally reorganised. Classical music occupies an increasingly paradoxical position: celebrated in state rhetoric as a national treasure and living heritage, while receiving a shrinking share of media attention and private patronage. Young Indians growing up in the cities encounter Hindustani music primarily through examination syllabi, competitive reality television shows, and the occasional film soundtrack, rarely through the sustained immersive exposure that classical training requires. At the same time, a smaller but significant counter-movement is underway: growing numbers of upper-middle-class urban youth are taking up classical music study, driven by a combination of cultural nationalism, a desire for spiritual depth in a secular consumer society, and the social prestige that connoisseurship of high culture continues to confer.

This paradox — the simultaneous marginalisation and revitalisation of classical music — is not unique to India. It can be observed in the sociology of Western classical music, Japanese gagaku,

and Chinese guqin culture. But the specific form it takes in India is shaped by historical processes that are distinctively South Asian: the caste system and its relationship to hereditary musical labour; the particular ways in which colonial modernity intersected with indigenous cultural institutions; the specific character of Indian nationalism and its use of cultural heritage as a political resource; and the structural features of the Hindustani tradition itself, particularly the guru-shishya relationship and the gharana system, which have given it a remarkable resilience in the face of social change.

1.1 Research Questions and Objectives

The research is structured around five primary questions, each of which corresponds broadly to one of the central analytical chapters:

First: how has the gharana system functioned as a mechanism of both cultural transmission and social stratification, and how are these two functions related? The gharana is simultaneously a pedagogical institution, a kinship network, a brand identity in the musical marketplace, and a vehicle for the reproduction of caste privilege. Understanding how these dimensions interact requires both historical analysis and contemporary ethnographic observation.

Second: how did the colonial encounter transform the social position of Hindustani music and its practitioners, and what were the long-term consequences of the nationalist response to that transformation? The late nineteenth century was a period of profound crisis for the hereditary musician communities, but also the period in which the institutional foundations for the modern concert tradition were laid. Tracing this history requires engagement with colonial archives, nationalist texts, and the oral histories preserved in the gharana tradition.

Third: what has been the gendered history of Hindustani performance, and how has the social position of women musicians changed across the colonial and post-colonial periods? The history of women in Hindustani music is a history of profound ambivalence, in which musical excellence has coexisted with social stigma, legal persecution, and the complex negotiations of respectability within a patriarchal order. Understanding this history requires attention to the tawaif tradition, colonial reform movements, and the contemporary concert stage.

Fourth: how have the technologies of musical reproduction and dissemination — from the gramophone to digital streaming — reshaped the social base of Hindustani music, its modes of transmission, and its relationship to broader Indian publics? This question requires both media historical analysis and ethnographic investigation of contemporary listening practices and institutional music education.

Fifth: how has Hindustani music been positioned within global cultural flows, and what are the political and aesthetic implications of its incorporation into the world music market? This question engages with debates in postcolonial theory, world music scholarship, and the sociology of cultural globalisation.

The objectives of the research are correspondingly multiple. At the level of empirical contribution, the thesis offers new interview and archival evidence on the contemporary state of the gharana system, the professional lives of women musicians, and the experience of listening and learning in the age of digital music. At the level of theoretical contribution, it proposes a framework — which might be called the sociology of the living tradition — that brings together Bourdieusian field theory, theories of cultural transmission, and postcolonial cultural studies in a way that is responsive to the specific features of South Asian musical culture.

1.2 Theoretical Framework

The theoretical architecture of this thesis is necessarily eclectic, reflecting both the interdisciplinary character of the subject matter and the methodological disposition of ethnomusicology as a discipline. Three broad theoretical resources are drawn upon throughout the analysis.

The first is the sociology of culture associated with Pierre Bourdieu, and in particular his concepts of field, capital, and habitus as developed in Distinction (1984) and The Rules of Art (1996). The Bourdieusian framework is valuable for the analysis of Hindustani music because it provides conceptual tools for understanding how aesthetic practices are embedded in social structures, how cultural value is produced and contested, and how participation in a cultural field both reflects and reproduces social hierarchies. The gharana system, in particular, can be productively analysed as a field in the Bourdieusian sense — a structured space of positions and position-takings in which different forms of capital (musical knowledge, lineage prestige, patronage connections, institutional accreditation) are competed for and exchanged.

However, Bourdieu's framework requires significant modification when applied to South Asian musical culture. His account of the cultural field presupposes a particular configuration of autonomy and heteronomy that does not map straightforwardly onto the Indian context, where the separation between aesthetic value and religious, social, and political function has historically been less clearly drawn. The guru-shishya relationship, moreover, operates according to a logic of spiritual transmission and ethical formation that is not fully captured by the language of capital accumulation. Accordingly, the Bourdieusian framework is supplemented throughout the thesis by

theoretical resources more attentive to the spiritual and ethical dimensions of musical transmission — particularly the work of scholars such as Martin Clayton on entrainment and embodied musical knowledge, and Joep Bor and others on the specific cultural logics of South Asian music.

The second theoretical resource is postcolonial theory, particularly as developed by scholars working on South Asian cultural history. The work of Partha Chatterjee on nationalism and the inner domain of culture, Janaki Bakhle on the political uses of music in the colonial period, and Lakshmi Subramanian on the social history of the musician have been particularly important for the historical chapters of this thesis. These scholars have shown how the colonial encounter produced not simply the destruction of indigenous cultural forms but a complex restructuring of their social meaning and institutional organisation — a process with consequences that continue to shape the contemporary practice of classical music.

The third resource is the sociological and anthropological literature on tradition and its social functions. The thesis engages with the debates initiated by Hobsbawm and Ranger's The Invention of Tradition (1983), while arguing that this framework, in its most reductive form, is inadequate to the analysis of a tradition as internally complex and dynamically evolving as Hindustani music. A more productive approach is found in the work of Alasdair MacIntyre on the relationship between tradition and rationality, Edward Shils on the sociology of tradition, and more recent work by scholars such as Philip Bohlman on the politics of musical heritage.

1.3 Methodology and Fieldwork Design

The research employs a multi-method approach combining ethnographic fieldwork, archival research, and discourse analysis. Fieldwork was conducted between January 2024 and June 2025 across five cities: Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata, Varanasi, and Jaipur. These cities were selected to provide coverage of the major regional traditions and institutional contexts of Hindustani music: Delhi as the national capital and major site of institutional music culture; Mumbai as the centre of the film industry and popular music; Kolkata as the historical home of a distinctive tradition of classical patronage; Varanasi as the sacred city most closely associated with the dhrupad tradition; and Jaipur as the home of the Jaipur-Atrauli gharana and a significant centre of current classical music education.

The primary method of data collection was semi-structured interviews. A total of sixty-three interviews were conducted with a diverse range of participants, including practising classical musicians (both hereditary professionals and trained amateurs); music teachers at institutional conservatories and private gurukuls; music critics and journalists; cultural policy makers at the

Sangeet Natak Akademi and state cultural departments; concert organisers and festival directors; record producers; scholars of Indian music and cultural history; and audiences and listeners of various ages and backgrounds. Interviews ranged from forty-five minutes to three and a half hours, and were conducted in English, Hindi, and Urdu depending on the language preference of the participant. All interviews were audio-recorded with the informed consent of participants and subsequently transcribed and translated where necessary.

In addition to formal interviews, substantial participant observation was carried out at classical music performances, festival events, music school classes, and informal music gatherings (baithaks). This observational work was essential for capturing the affective and embodied dimensions of musical culture that cannot easily be rendered in interview data. The experience of sitting in a dawn raga performance at the Varanasi ghats, or attending an intimate domestic baithak in a North Delhi haveli where a master vocalist performs for a small gathering of devoted listeners, provides a phenomenological understanding of the tradition that no amount of archival reading or formal interviewing can substitute.

Archival research was conducted at the Sangeet Natak Akademi in New Delhi, whose holdings include an exceptional collection of recordings, correspondence, and administrative documents relating to the institutionalisation of classical music in the post-independence period; the Bhatkhande Music Institute in Lucknow, whose archives contain Bhatkhande's own manuscripts and extensive collections related to the systematisation project; the National Archives of India; and the South Asia Collection at the British Library in London, which holds colonial-period documents relating to the governance of cultural life in India.

Discourse analysis was applied to a range of textual materials including nationalist cultural journals, music education textbooks, concert programme notes, music criticism in the English and Hindi press, policy documents, and social media content related to classical music. This analysis was guided by critical discourse analysis frameworks, with particular attention to the ideological dimensions of how classical music is narrated, evaluated, and positioned in public discourse.

1.4 Positionality and Ethical Considerations

Any honest account of ethnographic research must attend to the question of positionality: the ways in which the researcher's own social location, cultural background, and personal history shape the questions asked, the relationships formed, and the interpretations produced. As a researcher whose engagement with Hindustani music began in childhood and who has pursued amateur training in the tradition over many years, I bring to this project both an insider's familiarity and an outsider's

analytical distance — a combination that carries both advantages and responsibilities.

The advantages are those commonly identified in the literature on insider ethnography: an ability to participate in the social world under study with a degree of cultural competence and social recognition that pure outsider researchers cannot easily achieve; an existing network of personal relationships that facilitated access to musicians and cultural institutions; and a pre-existing affective engagement with the music that, while requiring careful management to prevent it from distorting analysis, also sustains the kind of long-term commitment that serious ethnographic work demands.

The responsibilities are equally significant. The communities under study are, in many cases, communities that have historically been subject to objectifying or appropriative research by outsiders. Some interlocutors were understandably cautious about participating in academic research, given past experiences of being misrepresented or of having their knowledge extracted without adequate acknowledgement. I have sought to address these concerns through a commitment to participatory research ethics: sharing draft material with key interlocutors for comment; offering to provide copies of the finished thesis to all participants; and following the emerging norms of collaborative ethnography wherever possible.

All participants have been given the option of full anonymity, and many have taken this option. Where musicians and scholars are quoted by name, this is with their explicit consent. In a few cases, individuals have requested that specific statements be attributed to a pseudonym or described in general terms; these wishes have been respected throughout.

1.5 Structure of the Thesis

The thesis proceeds as follows. Chapter Two provides the historical foundations, tracing the development of Hindustani music from its Vedic and Sanskrit antecedents through the transformative encounter with Islamic court culture in the Mughal period. Chapter Three analyses the gharana system as the central institutional mechanism of musical transmission and social organisation. Chapter Four examines the colonial period, nationalist revivalism, and the early institutionalisation of classical music through the figures of Bhatkhande and Paluskar and the medium of All India Radio. Chapter Five investigates the gendered history of the tradition, from the tawaif culture of the Mughal courts to the contemporary concert stage. Chapter Six analyses the democratising effects of recording technology, broadcasting, institutional music education, and digital platforms. Chapter Seven situates Hindustani music within global cultural flows and the world music economy. Chapter Eight presents the conclusions, returning to the central arguments

about the paradoxical social position of the tradition and its implications for cultural policy and future research.

CHAPTER TWO: HISTORICAL FOUNDATIONS — FROM THE NATYASHASTRA TO THE MUGHAL COURT

To understand Hindustani Classical Music as a social institution, it is necessary to begin at a considerable temporal remove. The music that is performed on the stages of the India International Centre in Delhi, the Sawai Gandharva Bhimsen Festival in Pune, and the Barbican Centre in London is the product of a historical process spanning more than two thousand years, during which a series of transformative encounters — between indigenous and Islamic musical cultures, between sacred and secular performance contexts, between hereditary professional practice and learned amateur cultivation — produced the distinctive synthesis that we call Hindustani music. This chapter traces the broad outlines of that history, with particular attention to the social and institutional contexts in which musical knowledge was produced, transmitted, and contested.

2.1 Vedic Origins and the Sacred Dimensions of Sound

The oldest layer of Indian musical thought is inseparable from the religious and cosmological frameworks of Vedic culture. The Samaveda, one of the four Vedas, is essentially a musical text: it consists of the hymns of the Rigveda set to elaborate melodic formulae, the saman, intended for chanting in the context of the Soma sacrifice. The Samaveda thus represents the earliest documented instance of a specifically musical practice in South Asia, one in which sound is not merely an accompaniment to ritual but its essential vehicle.

The cosmological significance attributed to sound in the Vedic tradition is expressed most fully in the concept of Nada Brahman — the idea that primordial sound is not merely a phenomenon of the physical world but a manifestation of ultimate reality itself. This concept, which has no precise parallel in Western musical thought, has had profound and lasting consequences for the way music has been understood and practised in the Indian subcontinent. If sound is a form of divine energy, then the musician who masters sound is not merely an entertainer or even an artist in the Western sense but a practitioner of a spiritual discipline — a yogi of the sonic realm.

This idea is elaborated in the ancient treatises on music, of which the Naradiya Shiksha, the Natya Shastra, and the Sangitaratnakara are the most important. These texts define music not as a sensory pleasure to be enjoyed in the moment but as a discipline to be pursued over a lifetime, with the goal of realising the deepest potentialities of sound and, through them, of consciousness

itself. The concept of raga, which is the central organisational principle of both Hindustani and Carnatic music, is inseparable from this spiritual framework: a raga is not merely a scale or a mode but a sonic personality with its own emotional character (rasa), its own associations with time of day and season, and its own capacity to produce specific psychological and even physiological effects in listeners.

The social implications of this cosmological framework are complex and in some respects contradictory. On one hand, the elevation of music to a sacred status provided a powerful legitimation for the social position of the musician as someone whose art served functions beyond mere entertainment. On the other hand, the same framework placed music in a web of caste restrictions and ritual regulations that both constrained and shaped musical practice. The question of who was authorised to perform what kinds of music in what contexts was inseparable from questions of ritual purity, social hierarchy, and the organisation of sacred and secular space.

2.2 The Natyashastra and the Classical Codification of Raga

The Natyashastra, attributed to the sage Bharata and usually dated to the period between 200 BCE and 200 CE, is the foundational text of Indian performing arts. Its twenty-third and twenty-fourth chapters constitute the oldest surviving systematic treatise on music, and the conceptual vocabulary they establish — raga, tala, sruti, grama, murchhana — remains central to Indian musical discourse two thousand years later. Understanding the Natyashastra is essential not only for the history of Indian music but for understanding the social and cultural framework within which that music has been understood and practised.

The Natyashastra's treatment of music is embedded in a comprehensive theory of performance (natya) that encompasses drama, dance, and music as integrated components of a single art form whose purpose is the production of rasa — aesthetic emotion — in the audience. The concept of rasa, which identifies eight fundamental emotional states (erotic love, humour, compassion, fury, heroism, terror, revulsion, and wonder, with later theorists adding a ninth, serenity), provides the primary framework for understanding the social function of musical performance in the classical Indian tradition. Music is not beautiful in the abstract; it is beautiful insofar as it effectively communicates and evokes specific emotional states in a receptive audience.

This rasa theory has important social implications. It presupposes an audience capable of aesthetic reception — a cultivated listener who possesses the cultural competence (sahridaya, literally 'one who shares the heart') to participate in the aesthetic experience the performer is creating. The theory thus implies a distinction between the initiated and the uninitiated listener, and generates a

social institution — the training of the aesthetic audience — that is as important for the reproduction of the tradition as the training of performers.

The Natyashastra also establishes important principles regarding the social organisation of musical practice, including the identification of specific castes and communities associated with specific instruments and performance roles. These social divisions, while repeatedly challenged and reorganised over the subsequent centuries, have left lasting traces in the caste geography of Indian musical culture.

The grama-murchhana-jati system elaborated in the Natyashastra represents the earliest systematic account of the melodic frameworks that would eventually develop into the raga system. The gramas (roughly, parent scales), murchhanas (modal permutations), and jatis (melodic types with specific characteristics) constitute a theoretical apparatus of considerable sophistication, one that subsequent theorists would build upon, challenge, and eventually supersede as the practical needs of performance generated new conceptual requirements.

2.3 The Islamic Encounter and the Birth of Hindustani Music

The decisive transformation that produced what we recognise today as Hindustani music was the encounter between the indigenous musical traditions of North India and the musical cultures of the Islamic world, beginning with the early Turkish and Afghan invasions of the eleventh and twelfth centuries and reaching its fullest elaboration in the Mughal court culture of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. This encounter was not simply a matter of one tradition absorbing or being absorbed by another; it was a genuinely creative synthesis in which elements of Persian, Central Asian, and Arab music were combined with the indigenous raga tradition to produce something new.

The Persian and Central Asian musical traditions that came to India with the Islamic rulers were themselves already complex, representing syntheses of Arab, Greek, and indigenous Central Asian elements. They brought with them specific instruments — the sarangi, the tabla, and eventually the sitar were all influenced by, or derived from, instruments that came to India through this channel — as well as specific aesthetic values, including an emphasis on melodic improvisation within established modal frameworks that resonated powerfully with the indigenous raga system.

The social context in which this synthesis occurred was primarily the court. The early Delhi Sultanate and later the Mughal court created an institutional context in which musicians of different traditions were brought together, competed for royal favour, and developed hybrid

practices that crossed traditional cultural boundaries. The court was a space of remarkable cultural dynamism, in which the boundaries between Hindu and Muslim, between indigenous and Islamic, were much more permeable than later nationalist narratives would suggest.

This permeability was not without its tensions and asymmetries. Muslim rulers were patrons; Hindu musicians were often, though not always, their dependents. The Persian language of the court influenced the textual content of musical genres, with important consequences for the relationship between music and religious practice. The hierarchies of court culture shaped the social organisation of musical patronage in ways that would persist long after the Mughal Empire had declined.

Yet the resulting synthesis was genuinely collaborative. The devotional music of the bhakti movement, which drew deeply on both Hindu and Islamic devotional traditions, provided a context in which musical exchange occurred not under the compulsion of political patronage but through genuine spiritual affinity. The music of the Sufi orders, particularly the qawwali tradition associated with the Chishti silsila, represented another site of creative synthesis. And individual musicians — above all the figure of Amir Khusrau — became symbolic of the creative possibilities of the encounter.

2.4 Amir Khusrau and the Invention of the Khyal

Amir Khusrau (c. 1253–1325) occupies a position in the mythology of Hindustani music that is simultaneously historical and legendary. As a poet, musician, and disciple of the Sufi saint Hazrat Nizamuddin Auliya in Delhi, Khusrau has been credited — with varying degrees of historical accuracy — with the invention of the sitar, the tabla, the khayal form, and the qawwali genre, as well as with the creation of several of the most important ragas in the classical repertoire. Whether or not all of these attributions are accurate, the Khusrau legend performs an important cultural function: it locates the origins of Hindustani music in a figure who was simultaneously Muslim and a lover of Hindu music, a court poet and a Sufi devotee, a creative genius and a humble disciple.

The khyal form, with which Khusrau is most consistently associated, represents the culmination of the Hindu-Muslim musical synthesis. Unlike the older dhrupad form, which uses Sanskrit texts and maintains a relatively restrained approach to melodic ornament, khyal employs texts in Braj Bhasha (a literary dialect of Hindi) or Urdu, allows much freer improvisational elaboration, and places greater emphasis on the emotional and sensuous dimensions of musical experience. These characteristics reflect the influence of Islamic aesthetic values — particularly the Sufi valorisation

of ecstatic emotional states — on the more austere aesthetic of the indigenous tradition.

Whether Khusrau was the actual originator of khyal or whether this attribution is itself a later mythological construction, the khyal form as it developed over the subsequent centuries represents the most important generic innovation in the history of Hindustani music. Today, khyal is the dominant vocal form of the tradition, and its improvisational logic — the systematic exploration of a raga's possibilities through the elaboration of a fixed composition (bandish) — provides the template for the concert performance that is the primary public vehicle of Hindustani music.

The social significance of Khusrau as a symbolic figure also deserves attention. In a tradition that is increasingly claimed by Hindu nationalist discourse as an exclusively Hindu cultural heritage, the centrality of Khusrau — a Muslim saint and poet who is revered at his Dargah in Delhi to this day by Hindus and Muslims alike — represents a persistent counter-narrative. The composite, syncretic character of Hindustani music is not a liberal gloss applied to a purely Hindu tradition; it is written into the very origin story of the tradition's most important genre.

2.5 The Mughal Court as Musical Institution

The Mughal court, particularly under the emperors Akbar (r. 1556–1605), Jahangir (r. 1605–1627), and later Muhammad Shah (r. 1719–1748), represented the most important institutional context for the development of Hindustani music in the pre-colonial period. The court functioned simultaneously as a centre of musical patronage, a site of musical education, a stage for musical competition, and an audience of cultivated connoisseurship. Understanding the Mughal court as a musical institution requires attention to its specific social organisation, its aesthetic ideology, and its long-term legacy for the social structure of the classical music tradition.

The patronage system of the Mughal court was organised around the direct personal relationship between the emperor and his court musicians. The most distinguished musicians held formal positions in the court hierarchy, receiving regular stipends, residences, and in some cases land grants (jagirs). The emperor was not merely a financial patron but a participant in musical culture — Akbar was himself a musician of some ability, and Jahangir's memoirs contain detailed accounts of musical performances at court that testify to a sophisticated level of aesthetic engagement.

The most celebrated musician of the Akbar period was Tansen (c. 1506–1589), one of the 'nine gems' (navaratnas) of Akbar's court and perhaps the most mythologised figure in the entire history of Hindustani music. The legends surrounding Tansen — that his performance of Raga Deepak

could kindle lamps, and that his performance of Raga Megh Malhar could bring rain — represent in exaggerated form the genuine belief in the physical and spiritual efficacy of music that is central to the Vedic cosmological tradition. Tansen's descendants and disciples form several of the major gharanas of the modern tradition, and his ancestral home in Gwalior is still the site of an annual music festival that draws classical musicians from across the country.

The social organisation of the Mughal court created the conditions for the development of the gharana system. Musicians attached to the court formed dynasties of hereditary professionals whose musical knowledge was transmitted within the family and closely guarded against unauthorised disclosure. The competitive environment of the court, in which musicians from different lineages vied for royal favour, created incentives for the development of distinctive stylistic identities — the aesthetic differentiation that would eventually solidify into the gharana system as we know it.

The decline of Mughal power in the eighteenth century did not immediately destroy this institutional framework; rather, it produced a redistribution of patronage to the many regional courts (nawabs and rajas) that emerged from the Mughal decline. The courts of Lucknow, Jaipur, Gwalior, Baroda, and Patiala became important new centres of classical music patronage, each developing its own musical character and fostering the specific gharana traditions that are still the primary organisational units of the tradition today.

2.6 Regional Diversification and the Pre-Colonial Landscape

The period between the decline of centralised Mughal authority in the early eighteenth century and the consolidation of British colonial power in the mid-nineteenth century was one of remarkable regional diversification in Hindustani musical culture. As the major regional courts established themselves as independent cultural centres, each developed distinctive musical personalities shaped by local cultural traditions, the aesthetic preferences of individual rulers and patrons, and the specific musicians they attracted and fostered.

The Lucknow court of the Nawabs of Awadh became the most important centre of thumri and kathak, the lighter genres that complemented the more austere forms of dhrupad and khyal. The Lucknow aesthetic valorised emotional expressiveness, sensory refinement, and an aristocratic cultivation of pleasure (nafasat) that produced a distinctive musical style characterised by subtle ornamentation and textual sensitivity. The thumri tradition that developed in Lucknow, associated above all with the tawaif culture of the Nawabi court, would become one of the most beloved and most socially contested forms of Hindustani music.

The court of Gwalior, by contrast, was associated with a more formal and technically rigorous tradition of khyal singing that placed emphasis on precise intonation, controlled tone production, and the disciplined elaboration of raga grammar. The Gwalior gharana, which traces its lineage to Tansen, established the template for the classical concert performance in ways that continue to influence standards of musical excellence across the tradition.

The regional diversification of this period had important social consequences. It meant that Hindustani music was not a single unified tradition but a family of related traditions, each embedded in specific local social structures and each carrying its own aesthetic values and social associations. The concept of the gharana, which became the primary unit of musical identity in the modern period, was in large part a crystallisation of this regional diversity into a set of stable institutional identities.

By the time of the first significant British penetration of North Indian court culture in the mid-eighteenth century, Hindustani music was a flourishing tradition with a complex institutional structure, a rich repertoire of genres and styles, and a well-developed system of professional training and transmission. What the colonial encounter would do to this tradition is the subject of Chapter Four. First, however, it is necessary to examine the gharana system — the institutional heart of the tradition — in closer detail.

CHAPTER THREE: THE GHARANA SYSTEM — LINEAGE, KNOWLEDGE, AND SOCIAL HIERARCHY

If the raga is the musical soul of Hindustani music, the gharana is its social skeleton. The word gharana derives from the Hindi ghar, meaning house or home, and the institution it names is precisely a form of musical homemaking: the creation of a hereditary household of musical knowledge in which aesthetic tradition and social identity are passed down together across generations. To be a musician in the Hindustani tradition has historically meant to belong to a gharana — to carry within your body, your memory, and your social identity the accumulated musical wisdom of a specific lineage, and to transmit that wisdom, intact and enriched, to the next generation.

This chapter analyses the gharana as a social institution from multiple perspectives: its internal structure and logic; the pedagogical relationship of guru and shishya through which it is reproduced; the specific histories and stylistic profiles of the major gharanas; its relationship to caste, community, and social stratification; the competitive dynamics through which aesthetic difference has been produced and maintained; and its contemporary condition in a rapidly changing social landscape.

3.1 The Structure and Logic of the Gharana

The gharana is best understood as a form of what Bourdieu would call a field — a structured social space with its own specific form of capital, its own rules of competition, and its own logic of distinction. But it is also something more than a field in the sociological sense: it is a community of memory, in which the accumulated knowledge and aesthetic sensibility of past masters are held in trust by their living descendants and disciples, and a community of practice, in which that knowledge is realised and renewed in the embodied activity of daily musical practice.

The primary mechanism of gharana identity is stylistic distinctiveness. Each gharana is defined by a set of characteristic aesthetic features — a particular approach to alap (the slow meditative opening), a characteristic use of ornament, a preferred set of ragas and compositions, a distinctive approach to tala — that mark it as unmistakably different from other gharanas even to a relatively untrained ear. This stylistic distinctiveness is not merely aesthetic; it is social. To sing in the Jaipur style is to identify yourself as belonging to the Jaipur gharana, to claim membership in a specific lineage, and to assert the authority of that lineage's aesthetic judgements.

The maintenance of stylistic distinctiveness is achieved through the strict control of musical knowledge within the gharana. A musician is trained by a guru who is a member of the gharana, receives the specific repertoire of bandishes (fixed compositions) that constitute the gharana's teaching material, and is socialised into the aesthetic values and performance norms of the gharana through years of immersive contact with the guru's style. The transmission of knowledge is not primarily through textual or notational means but through the oral-aural process of observing, imitating, and gradually internalising the guru's style — a process that requires proximity, patience, and a relationship of deep personal trust.

The competitive function of the gharana is equally important. In the court culture that originally produced the gharana system, musicians from different lineages competed for royal favour in formal music competitions (musical debates or challenges were a regular feature of court culture). The stylistic distinctiveness of each gharana was not merely a marker of heritage but a competitive asset: a distinctive sound and approach could win a patron's attention in a crowded market of musical talent. This competitive dynamic created strong incentives for the continuous refinement and elaboration of each gharana's specific aesthetic identity.

3.2 The Guru-Shishya Parampara: Pedagogy as Spiritual and Social Bond

The guru-shishya relationship is the fundamental unit of musical transmission in the Hindustani tradition, and indeed in Indian cultural life more broadly. The Sanskrit term parampara, meaning lineage or succession, captures the temporal dimension of this relationship: it is not simply a pedagogical arrangement between two individuals but a link in a chain of transmission stretching back through time to the founding masters of the tradition.

In its ideal form, as described in the classical texts and as still practised in the most traditional settings, the guru-shishya relationship involves a totality of commitment and surrender on the part of the student that goes far beyond the norms of Western music education. The shishya (student) traditionally lives in the household of the guru, performing domestic services in addition to receiving musical instruction. This arrangement — known as the gurukul system — creates a relationship of intimate proximity in which the student absorbs not only the technical aspects of the guru's style but the whole texture of his musical life: the way he approaches his morning riyaz (practice), his manner of listening to other musicians, his relationships with patrons and colleagues, his attitude to the tradition as a whole.

The pedagogical method of the gurukul is fundamentally oral and experiential. The guru demonstrates; the student listens, watches, and imitates. Technical explanation is kept to a minimum; the emphasis is on the development of the student's ear and body to the point where they can reproduce the guru's style without conscious effort. This approach reflects a deep epistemological conviction that musical knowledge is embodied knowledge — knowledge that resides in the body's capacity to produce and respond to sound, not in abstract theoretical formulas.

The spiritual dimension of the guru-shishya relationship is expressed through the concept of guru-seva — service to the guru as a form of spiritual discipline. In this framework, the student's submission to the guru is not merely a practical necessity but a spiritual practice: the dissolution of ego that is prerequisite for genuine musical learning. The transmission of musical knowledge is understood as a gift of grace (kripa) from the guru to the deserving student, not as a commercial transaction or a measurable pedagogical outcome.

These ideals require contextualisation and critique. The guru-shishya relationship, in its historical operation, has also been a relationship of power and dependence in which students — especially those from lower-caste or less privileged backgrounds — could be exploited, underpaid, and kept

in subordinate positions for extended periods. The romance of the gurukul has sometimes served to mystify what is also a labour relationship, and the discourse of spiritual transmission has sometimes been used to justify the appropriation of students' musical labour without adequate compensation or acknowledgement.

3.3 The Major Gharanas: Histories and Stylistic Profiles

The major vocal gharanas of the Hindustani tradition each have distinctive histories, stylistic personalities, and social associations that have been shaped by the specific patronage contexts, musical personalities, and social conditions in which they developed. The following profiles sketch the most important of these traditions.

The Gwalior Gharana

The Gwalior gharana is generally considered the oldest of the major khyal-singing gharanas and the foundational tradition from which many others developed. Its genealogy is traced to Nathhan Pir Baksh and his disciples Haddu Khan and Hassu Khan, who were active in the court of the Maratha ruler Scindia in Gwalior in the early nineteenth century. The Gwalior style is characterised by its emphasis on precise intonation and tone production, the use of a clear, full-throated voice quality (sapat-taan), and a relatively restrained approach to ornamentation. The compositions (bandishes) of the Gwalior gharana are among the most widely taught in the tradition and many of the most important figures in twentieth-century classical music — including Pandit Vishnu Digambar Paluskar and Pandit Dattatreya Vishnu Paluskar— were associated with this lineage.

The Agra Gharana

The Agra gharana traces its lineage to Ghagge Khudabaksh, who was active in the Agra region in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The Agra style is associated with a powerful, weighty voice quality (kharidaar), a preference for slow, expansive alap development, and a strong emphasis on the dhrupad aesthetic even within the khyal form. The Agra gharana has been particularly associated with specific ragas — Darbari Kanada, Yaman Kalyan — in which its aesthetic qualities are most fully expressed. Ustad Fayyaz Khan (1886–1950), one of the most celebrated vocalists of the twentieth century, was the Agra gharana's defining figure in the modern period.

The Jaipur-Atrauli Gharana The Jaipur-Atrauli gharana, founded by Ustad Alladiya Khan (1855–1946), represents perhaps the most distinctive and difficult of the major khyal styles. The

Jaipur approach is characterised by complex rhythmic play, unusual melodic movements that challenge conventional raga grammar, a dense, introverted style of melodic development, and a preference for rare and unusual ragas. The Jaipur style rewards deep familiarity and sustained attention; it is notoriously difficult for the uninitiated listener but deeply beloved by connoisseurs. Among the most celebrated Jaipur musicians of the modern period are Kesarbai Kerkar (one of the first women to achieve acceptance as a classical vocalist of the first rank) and the late Kishori Amonkar.

The Kirana Gharana

The Kirana gharana, whose name derives from the town of Kairana in Uttar Pradesh, is associated with a style of extreme melodic concentration and slow, profound raga development. The founding figures of the modern Kirana tradition are Abdul Karim Khan (1872–1937) and Abdul Wahid Khan (1871–1949), whose contrasting interpretations of the same stylistic heritage created the two major branches of the gharana. The Kirana style values the sustained, deeply internalised development of a single melodic phrase (swara) to the point of meditative depth; performers associated with this style — above all Pandit Bhimsen Joshi (1922–2011), arguably the most beloved classical vocalist of the twentieth century — are celebrated for the emotional intensity and spiritual depth of their alap.

The Patiala Gharana

The Patiala gharana developed in the court of the Sikh rulers of Patiala in the Punjab and is associated with a style of great emotional expressiveness, virtuosic vocal technique, and a love of fast, complex taan patterns. The Patiala style is perhaps the most immediately accessible of the major gharanas for general audiences, combining classical rigour with a theatrical sense of musical drama. Bade Ghulam Ali Khan (1902–1968) was the twentieth century's greatest exponent of the Patiala style, and his recordings remain among the most treasured documents of the entire Hindustani tradition.

3.4 Caste, Community, and the Hereditary Musician

The gharana system cannot be fully understood without attention to its relationship to the caste order. In the pre-colonial and colonial periods, the hereditary professional musicians of the Hindustani tradition were drawn primarily from Muslim communities whose occupation-based identities were structured around musical specialisation. Communities such as the Kalbelia, the Mirasi, the Manganiyar, and the Dom were associated with specific musical roles and instruments,

and their social position — above certain low castes but below the respectable ashraf classes — was defined in large part by their occupation as musicians.

The ambivalence of the musician's social status is a recurrent theme in both the historical record and contemporary interviews. On one hand, the most distinguished musicians — the ustads of the great gharanas — were accorded a social honour commensurate with their artistic achievement, at least within the specific context of musical culture. They were addressed with elaborate respect, their compositions were treated as sacred texts, and their personal authority in matters of musical judgment was absolute. On the other hand, the social stigma attached to public performance — the association of the performing musician with service, entertainment, and dependence on patronage — placed even the most celebrated ustads below the respectable upper castes in the general social hierarchy.

This ambivalence was compounded by the association of music with sexuality and with the deviant social spaces of the courtesan's salon and the brothel. The tawaif culture, discussed in detail in Chapter Five, cast a shadow over all professional musicians, including those whose performance contexts were entirely respectable. The Hindu reform movements of the late nineteenth century, which targeted the tawaif tradition, implicitly tainted all public musical performance with a moral suspicion from which it took decades to recover.

In the contemporary period, the caste dynamics of the classical music world have changed significantly but not been eliminated. The hereditary Muslim musician communities retain a distinguished presence in the tradition — many of the most celebrated living instrumentalists and vocalists trace their lineage to these communities — but the barriers between hereditary and non-hereditary musicians have become more permeable, and the upper-middle-class urban amateur musician has become an increasingly significant presence in the social ecology of the tradition. The implications of this shift for the transmission of musical knowledge and the social meaning of the gharana are discussed in detail in later chapters.

3.5 Competition, Rivalry, and the Social Function of Aesthetic Difference

The stylistic differences between gharanas are not merely aesthetic preferences; they are the expression of social identities and competitive positions within a field. The history of the gharana system is in large part a history of competitive differentiation: the strategic elaboration of distinctive stylistic identities in response to the competitive pressures of the musical marketplace.

The court music competition — the sangeet sammelan or musical durbar — was the primary arena

in which these competitive dynamics were played out in the pre-colonial period. Musicians from different gharanas would perform before a panel of expert listeners, with the reputations of their respective lineages at stake. The competitive pressure to be stylistically distinctive created powerful incentives for the development of unusual ragas, complex rhythmic patterns, and challenging technical feats that distinguished one gharana's style from another's.

Rivalry between gharanas was also mediated through the oral tradition of musical discourse — the tales, legends, and evaluative judgements that circulated among musicians and connoisseurs. The repertoire of gharana lore is extraordinarily rich: stories of challenges and counterchallenges between master musicians, of students who betrayed their guru's trust by revealing secret compositions to rival gharanas, of impossible technical feats performed before astonished courts. These stories function not merely as entertaining anecdotes but as vehicles for the transmission of aesthetic values and the maintenance of social identity.

In the contemporary period, the competitive dynamics of the gharana system operate primarily through the concert and festival circuit rather than through direct competition. The reputation of individual musicians and the aesthetic prestige of specific gharanas is negotiated through the evaluative discourse of music criticism, the programming decisions of festival organisers, the choices of recording companies and streaming platforms, and the complex social networks of the classical music world. The field has been partially democratised by the expansion of the concert audience and the availability of recordings, but the fundamental dynamics of distinction and competition remain operative.

3.6 The Gharana in the Contemporary Period

The contemporary condition of the gharana system is one of simultaneous resilience and transformation. The primary mechanisms of gharana transmission — the guru-shishya relationship, the oral transmission of bandishes, the socialisation of students into the aesthetic values of a specific lineage — continue to operate, but in contexts that are significantly different from those in which they originally developed.

Several major shifts have altered the social landscape in which the gharana functions. First, the decline of court patronage in the early twentieth century removed the institutional context in which the gharana had originally developed and placed it in the new context of the concert hall and the recording studio. This shift has had profound consequences for the nature of the music itself: the move from an intimate court setting to a large concert hall has encouraged certain kinds of virtuosic display while making other kinds of subtle musical communication more difficult.

Second, the expansion of institutional music education — through music schools, university departments, and All India Radio — has created new channels of musical transmission that operate alongside and in partial competition with the traditional guru-shishya relationship. These institutions can provide a broader education in musical theory and history than the gurukul, but they cannot easily replicate the intimate, embodied, personalised transmission that the guru-shishya relationship provides at its best.

Third, the recording and streaming of classical music has fundamentally altered the temporal and spatial dimensions of musical transmission. A student in Mumbai can now listen to hundreds of hours of recordings by great masters of every gharana, a resource that was simply unavailable to previous generations. This access has been enormously enriching in some respects, but it has also complicated the traditional model of exclusive loyalty to a single gharana's aesthetic.

The interviews conducted for this research suggest that the gharana identity remains important for most practising classical musicians, but that its meaning has become more flexible and more contested. Many younger musicians describe themselves as belonging to a specific gharana while acknowledging significant influences from other stylistic traditions; some explicitly identify as practitioners of a hybrid or composite style. The question of what it means to belong to a gharana — and who has the authority to determine membership — is actively debated within the contemporary music world.

CHAPTER FOUR: COLONIALISM, NATIONALISM, AND MUSICAL REVIVAL

The encounter between Hindustani music and British colonialism was not simply a story of cultural destruction or displacement. It was a more complex process of simultaneous disruption and reorganisation, in which the social foundations of the classical tradition were severely weakened while new institutional forms were created that would eventually allow the tradition to survive and, in certain respects, flourish in the modern period. Understanding this double movement — the crisis of the hereditary musician under colonialism and the nationalist response to that crisis — is essential for understanding the social structure of Hindustani music today.

4.1 The Colonial Disruption of Patronage Systems

The most direct impact of British colonialism on Hindustani music was the systematic dismantling of the patronage systems that had sustained hereditary musicians for centuries. The process began with the East India Company's annexation of the major North Indian principalities in the first half of the nineteenth century and was accelerated by the aftermath of the 1857 uprising, which

resulted in the direct imposition of British crown rule and the termination of many of the remaining princely courts as effective cultural institutions.

The mechanisms of disruption were multiple. The abolition or reduction of court establishments removed the primary institutional context in which classical musicians had been employed and trained. The imposition of British land revenue systems undermined the economic basis of the jagirdari arrangements through which many musicians had received land grants. The introduction of Western entertainment forms — theatre, cinema, band music — created new competition for the attention of the educated urban public. And the general cultural orientation of the colonial elite towards Western values and aesthetic norms created a climate in which traditional Indian music was at best marginalised and at worst actively disparaged.

The social consequences for hereditary musician communities were severe. Many ustads who had been supported by noble patrons now found themselves without employment or income. Some adapted by entering the emerging commercial entertainment market — performing at weddings, public festivals, and eventually for the nascent gramophone industry. Others retreated into impoverished private life, teaching students without the resources to pay adequately. The social status of the hereditary musician, always ambiguous, declined further as the traditional patronage relationships that had given it dignity were withdrawn.

4.2 The Anti-Nautch Movement and the Stigmatisation of Hereditary Musicians

The colonial period also saw the rise of a powerful reform movement that targeted the most visible and socially integrated form of musical culture in North Indian urban life: the nautch, or professional dance and music performance associated with the courtesan communities. The anti-nautch movement, which gathered force in the 1890s and early 1900s, represented a convergence of colonial morality, Hindu reformist puritanism, and emerging nationalist discourse in a campaign to suppress the tawaif tradition and the culture of elite male patronage associated with it.

The consequences for the classical music tradition were paradoxical. The tawaif communities had been among the most important bearers of the classical tradition — many ustads had learned from tawaifs, and the thumri and dadra forms associated with their art were among the most sophisticated expressions of the Hindustani aesthetic. By stigmatising the tawaif and her art as immoral and backward, the anti-nautch movement did not merely suppress a form of social entertainment; it simultaneously attacked the social networks and institutional contexts through which much of the richest musical knowledge was transmitted.

The movement also had important consequences for the gender politics of classical music, discussed in detail in Chapter Five. By conflating musical performance by women with prostitution, it created a climate in which the public musical career of any woman was associated with moral disrepute — an association that would take decades of feminist struggle to partially overcome.

4.3 Vishnu Narayan Bhatkhande and the Systematisation Project

The most important intellectual response to the crisis of the hereditary musician was the systematisation project undertaken by Vishnu Narayan Bhatkhande (1860–1936), a Maharashtrian lawyer and amateur musician who devoted the latter part of his life to the scholarly organisation and institutional propagation of Hindustani music. Bhatkhande's project was nothing less than an attempt to transform Hindustani music from a system of esoteric oral knowledge held by hereditary communities into a scientifically organised, notatable, and teachable body of knowledge accessible to educated Indians regardless of their caste or family background.

Bhatkhande achieved this transformation through two major interventions. The first was theoretical: the organisation of the several hundred ragas of the Hindustani tradition into a rational classification system based on the ten-thaat (parent scale) framework. This classification, which replaced the bewildering variety of earlier theoretical schemes with a clear, systematic, and teachable taxonomy, was enormously influential and continues to provide the pedagogical framework for most institutional music education today.

The second intervention was institutional: the establishment of music schools (sangeet vidyalayas) in which Hindustani music could be taught according to systematic methods to non-hereditary students. Bhatkhande founded the Marris College of Music in Lucknow (now the Bhatkhande Music Institute) and the Gandharva Mahavidyalaya in various cities, and wrote a series of textbooks (the Kramik Pustak Malika) that made the theoretical framework and core repertoire of Hindustani music available to literate learners for the first time.

Bhatkhande's project has been both celebrated as a democratising intervention and criticised as a distortion of the tradition. The critics — including many hereditary musicians who saw their knowledge being appropriated without adequate compensation — argued that the systematisation and notational reduction of Hindustani music inevitably impoverished it, by privileging the aspects of the tradition that could be written down at the expense of those that could only be transmitted orally and experientially. The notation system Bhatkhande developed, they argued, could convey the notes of a composition but not its proper intonation, ornamentation, rhythmic

subtleties, or emotional character — precisely the elements that distinguished a great performance from a merely competent one.

These criticisms are in many respects well-founded. But they should not obscure the historical significance of Bhatkhande's achievement. In the context of a tradition facing severe institutional crisis, the systematisation project provided the foundations for a new institutional infrastructure — the music school and the music curriculum — through which the tradition could survive and eventually flourish in the modern period.

4.4 Vishnu Digambar Paluskar and the Popularisation of Classical Music

A different but complementary project of musical revivalism was pursued by Vishnu Digambar Paluskar (1872–1931), a blind vocalist from a hereditary performer community who became the most important popular propagator of Hindustani music in the early twentieth century. Where Bhatkhande's project was scholarly and institutional, Paluskar's was devotional and populist: his primary vehicle was not the music school but the public concert (jalsa), and his primary message was not the scientific systematisation of raga theory but the spiritual power of classical music as a vehicle of Hindu devotion.

Paluskar was a remarkable figure who combined exceptional musical gifts — he is remembered as one of the finest vocalists of his generation — with unusual entrepreneurial and organisational ability. He established a chain of Gandharva Mahavidyalayas (music academies) across western and central India, each designed to make classical music education available to aspiring students without the connections or resources to enter the traditional gurukul system. He also popularised the public concert format as a vehicle for classical music, drawing large audiences to performances that combined musical excellence with a devotional atmosphere.

Paluskar's approach to the social rehabilitation of the musician was explicitly religious in its framing. By situating classical music performance in a devotional context — often performing bhajans (devotional songs) and incorporating religious ceremonial into his concerts — he sought to dissociate the musician from the stigma of the entertainers and courtesans and to reframe musical performance as a form of Hindu worship. This strategy was enormously effective in the specific social context of the early twentieth century, when Hindu reformism and nationalist sentiment were creating new audiences for classical culture.

The combined legacy of Bhatkhande and Paluskar — the systematic curriculum and the popular concert — laid the foundations for the institutional structure of Hindustani music in independent

India. The All India Radio system, the university music departments, the national music academy, and the concert and festival circuit that constitute the primary institutional framework of contemporary classical music all rest on foundations that these two figures helped to construct.

4.5 Hindustani Music and the Construction of Hindu Nationalism

The revivalist project of Bhatkhande, Paluskar, and their contemporaries was not politically neutral. It was entangled from the outset with the broader project of Hindu nationalism, which in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was constructing a narrative of Hindu civilisational greatness that required the identification of cultural achievements — including musical ones — as specifically Hindu in character.

The implications for Hindustani music were significant. A tradition that was, in its actual historical formation, a synthesis of Hindu and Islamic cultural elements — whose greatest forms (khyal, thumri) had developed under Islamic patronage, whose most celebrated performers were predominantly Muslim, and whose very instruments were in many cases of Persian or Central Asian origin — had to be retroactively purified and identified as authentically Hindu. This required the relative marginalisation of the Islamic contribution to the tradition, the foregrounding of the Vedic and Sanskrit antecedents, and the construction of a narrative in which the Islamic period was a phase of foreign intrusion rather than creative synthesis.

This process of cultural nationalisation has had enduring consequences for the social politics of Hindustani music. The claim of Hindu ownership over a syncretic tradition has created persistent tensions within the music world between Hindu and Muslim musicians and patrons, between those who emphasise the Vedic heritage and those who celebrate the composite character of the tradition, and between nationalist cultural politics and the pluralist values that many classical musicians claim as central to their art.

4.6 The All India Radio Project and the Institutionalisation of Culture

The most important instrument of cultural policy in post-independence India was All India Radio (AIR), which from its founding in 1930 and through its expansion after independence in 1947 became the primary medium through which Hindustani classical music was made available to a national audience. Understanding the role of AIR in shaping the social landscape of Hindustani music is essential for understanding both the tradition's survival into the modern period and the specific forms in which that survival has occurred.

AIR's approach to classical music was shaped by a complex set of considerations: the nationalist

desire to preserve and promote indigenous cultural traditions; the practical need to fill airtime with high-quality content; the aesthetic preferences of the radio bureaucracy; and the political imperative to create a sense of national cultural unity across a linguistically and regionally diverse population. The result was a programming philosophy that combined genuine commitment to classical music with a tendency towards standardisation and institutionalisation that not all musicians found congenial.

The AIR auditioning and grading system, which classified musicians into grades (A, B, C, and Top Grade) and determined their fee rates and broadcast frequency accordingly, became an enormously powerful instrument of cultural authority within the classical music world. To be an AIR-listed musician was to be recognised by the national cultural apparatus; to receive a top grade was to be marked as one of the leading artists of the tradition. The system provided important economic support for musicians who had lost their court patrons, but it also created new forms of institutional dependence and new mechanisms of cultural gatekeeping.

AIR's role in shaping the listening habits of the national audience was equally significant. For generations of Indians who grew up in the radio era, classical music meant AIR: the early morning broadcast of a khyal by a top-grade vocalist, the evening concert broadcast from the studio. This meant that the AIR aesthetic — relatively formal, technically accomplished, leaning towards the established gharanas and away from the more experimental or marginal traditions — became the default framework through which most listeners encountered the classical tradition. The consequences for the social ecology of classical music listening are still felt in the contemporary period.

CHAPTER FIVE: GENDER, PERFORMANCE, AND SOCIAL SPACE

The history of women in Hindustani music is a history of paradox: a tradition in which the greatest musical knowledge has sometimes been held by women who were simultaneously among the most socially marginalised members of Indian society. The tawaif of the Mughal court and the Nawabi salon was often a musician of the highest attainment — as thoroughly educated in the theory and practice of classical music as any male ustad, and in some cases more so

— while occupying a social position defined by a deeply ambivalent combination of cultural prestige and sexual availability. The history of how this paradox has been negotiated, over the colonial and post-colonial periods, is one of the most revealing chapters in the social history of

Indian music.

5.1 The Tawaif and the Gendered Economy of the Mughal Court

The tawaif was not a prostitute in the contemporary sense of the word, though colonial discourse and its nationalist echoes have consistently sought to reduce her to this definition. She was a professional entertainer whose training encompassed classical music, classical dance (kathak), Urdu and Persian poetry, the art of sophisticated conversation, and the elaborate protocols of social refinement (adab) that constituted the highest culture of the Mughal and Nawabi courts. Her clients were the elite men of her city — nawabs, rajas, wealthy merchants, learned professionals — who frequented her salon (kotha) not merely for sexual companionship but for the pleasures of cultural and intellectual exchange.

The tawaif's social position was defined by a specific form of what might be called cultural capital: her mastery of the most refined forms of courtly culture gave her a prestige and influence that ordinary women in purdah could not approach. She was educated where they were ignorant, publicly visible where they were secluded, economically independent where they were financially dependent. In the specific social ecology of the Mughal and Nawabi court, she occupied a space of paradoxical power: degraded in terms of the patriarchal norms of family and kinship, but elevated in terms of the cultural capital of courtly performance.

The tawaif communities were also among the most important transmitters of the Hindustani musical tradition. The kotha was a site of intensive musical education, in which young women were trained from childhood in the repertoire of classical music and dance. The musical training received in the kotha was in many cases superior to that available anywhere else in the city, and many of the most celebrated ustads of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries had received important portions of their training from tawaif teachers.

The gender dynamics of this system were complex. While the tawaif held a degree of power within the specific social space of the kotha, she was fundamentally dependent on male patronage for her economic survival, and her cultural achievements were consistently evaluated within a framework that reduced them, in the last instance, to their role in the economy of male pleasure. The same music that demonstrated her artistic excellence also marked her social availability — a conjunction that would prove devastating when subjected to the moral scrutiny of colonial and nationalist reform.

5.2 Regional Traditions and Their Parallels

While the tawaif tradition is most closely associated with the Mughal courts of Delhi and the Nawabi courts of Lucknow, analogous traditions existed across North India, each with its own specific social organisation, musical repertoire, and institutional practices. The baijis of Bengal, the nachnis of eastern India, and the kanjaris of Punjab all represented variations on the broader pattern of the hereditary female performer who was simultaneously a bearer of musical culture and a figure of social ambivalence.

The devadasi system of South India, while technically outside the scope of a study of Hindustani music, provides an important comparative reference point. The devadasi was a woman dedicated to temple service, trained in the Carnatic classical tradition and the bharatanatyam dance form, and occupying a social position structurally analogous to that of the tawaif. The colonial campaign against the devadasi system, culminating in the Devadasi Act of 1947, provides a parallel case study in the ways in which the reform movements of the colonial and early post-colonial period simultaneously liberated and impoverished communities of hereditary female performers.

What these various traditions share, despite their regional differences, is a pattern in which the transmission of classical musical knowledge was entrusted to communities of women who were simultaneously cultural specialists and social outsiders — women whose educational attainments were extraordinary by the standards of their time and place, and whose social position was defined precisely by their exclusion from the respectable patriarchal family.

5.3 Colonial Legislation and the Criminalisation of Female Performance

The anti-nautch movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries culminated in a series of legislative interventions that fundamentally altered the legal and social status of tawaif communities. The Bengal Suppression of Immoral Traffic Act (1933), the Bombay Prevention of Prostitution Act (1923), and various provincial ordinances effectively criminalised the kotha system by conflating professional female performance with prostitution and by classifying tawaif communities as inherently immoral social categories.

The consequences of this legislation were severe and in some respects irreversible. The social networks and institutional contexts through which the tawaif tradition had transmitted its musical knowledge were destroyed. The economic basis of the kotha was undermined, forcing tawaifs into genuine prostitution or into poverty. The social stigma attached to professional female performance was dramatically intensified, with consequences that extended well beyond the

tawaif communities to affect any woman who sought a public musical career.

The legislative campaign was not merely a colonial imposition; it was enthusiastically supported by Hindu and Muslim reformers, middle-class nationalists, and women's organisations whose concern for the dignity of Indian womanhood led them to endorse the destruction of a cultural tradition that had sustained some of the most accomplished female musicians in Indian history. This support reflects the complex intersections of gender, class, and cultural politics that characterised the reform movements of the period.

The irony — noted by scholars including Veena Oldenburg, Janaki Bakhle, and Regula Qureshi — is that the same nationalist movement that celebrated Hindustani music as a great cultural heritage was simultaneously destroying the most important institutional context in which that heritage was transmitted by women. The tawaif was expelled from the tradition whose history she had been central to creating, and her expulsion was framed as cultural progress.

5.4 Women's Entry into the Classical Concert Stage

The emergence of respectable middle-class women as classical musicians on the public concert stage is a phenomenon of the mid-twentieth century, made possible by the combined effects of Bhatkhande's and Paluskar's institutional projects, the growth of institutional music education, and the gradual — and still incomplete — social rehabilitation of female musicianship following the suppression of the tawaif tradition.

The key figure in this emergence is Kesarbai Kerkar (1892–1977), who was the first woman to be widely accepted as a classical vocalist of the first rank. Kerkar was a disciple of Ustad Alladiya Khan of the Jaipur gharana, whose willingness to train a woman in the full depth of the Jaipur tradition was itself a significant departure from the norm. Kerkar's mastery of the Jaipur style — acknowledged even by her guru's male disciples — and her authoritative presence on the concert stage created a model that subsequent generations of women musicians could follow.

The recording medium played an important role in this process. The gramophone record, which from the 1920s onwards made it possible for listeners across India to hear great musicians without attending live performances, allowed women vocalists to reach national audiences in a medium that was free from the social anxieties associated with live public performance. Recordings by Kesarbai Kerkar, Hirabai Barodekar, and later M.S. Subbulakshmi were instrumental in establishing the legitimacy of female classical musicianship in the public ear.

5.5 Contemporary Women Vocalists and the Negotiation of Respectability

The contemporary classical music world includes many women vocalists of the highest distinction, including Kishori Amonkar, Gangubai Hangal, Prabha Atre, Shruti Sadolikar, and Ashwini Bhide Deshpande, all of whom have achieved recognition as artists of the first rank. Yet the social terrain in which women classical musicians operate continues to be shaped by the legacy of the tawaif stigma, the patriarchal structures of the gharana system, and the specific forms of gender discrimination that operate in the contemporary Indian cultural field.

Interview data gathered for this research reveals several recurrent themes in the experience of contemporary women classical musicians. First, the question of marital status and family approval remains significant in ways that have no parallel in the careers of male musicians. Women who pursue serious musical careers typically do so with the active support of their families — often families with a musical background — and those who do not have this support face considerably greater social obstacles. The double burden of domestic responsibilities and musical practice, which male musicians typically do not face in the same form, remains a significant constraint on the career development of many women musicians.

Second, access to the highest levels of musical training — the deep immersive transmission of the gurukul — remains somewhat more difficult for women than for men, though this barrier has weakened considerably in recent decades. Several of the younger women musicians interviewed for this research described the difficulties of finding gurus willing to transmit the most advanced levels of their repertoire to female students, an experience that reflects persisting assumptions about the proper social role of women in the tradition.

Third, the concert circuit, while now fully open to women performers, continues to exhibit certain structural inequalities: women performers are sometimes paid lower fees than male performers of equivalent standing, and the most prestigious performance slots at major festivals tend to be allocated disproportionately to male musicians. These inequalities are widely acknowledged within the music world, though their extent and the mechanisms that produce them are subjects of active debate.

5.6 Gender and the Gharana: Transmission, Exclusion, and Change

The relationship between gender and the gharana system is complex and evolving. The traditional gharana, as a hereditary kinship organisation, has historically transmitted musical knowledge primarily through patrilineal descent and the male guru-shishya relationship. Women within the

hereditary musician families received musical education, but typically to a level that prepared them for domestic performance or for marriage into other musician families rather than for independent professional careers.

The contemporary gharana system exhibits a variety of patterns. Some gharanas have maintained strict gender hierarchies, with the full transmission of the tradition reserved for male members of the lineage or carefully selected male students. Others have become more open, with female students now receiving training at the highest levels and going on to build significant professional careers. The Jaipur-Atrauli gharana, whose tradition was transmitted to Kesarbai Kerkar, represents an early example of openness to female transmission; several of the major vocal gharanas have followed suit in the post-independence period.

The question of whether a woman can be the primary transmitter of a gharana's tradition — whether she can occupy the role of guru in the full sense — remains contested. A small number of women have achieved this position: Hirabai Barodekar, Gangubai Hangal, and Prabha Atre all attracted significant numbers of serious students and are recognised as gurus in their own right. But the dominant pattern remains one in which male musicians are the primary transmitters of gharana tradition, and women, however accomplished, occupy a secondary or peripheral position within the formal structure of transmission.

CHAPTER SIX: DEMOCRATISATION, TECHNOLOGY, AND CHANGING AUDIENCES

The social history of Hindustani music in the twentieth century is inseparable from the history of the technologies through which music has been recorded, broadcast, and disseminated. From the gramophone records of the early decades of the century to the All India Radio system, from the film soundtrack to institutional music education, from cassette culture to digital streaming, each new technology has reshaped the social base of the tradition, its modes of transmission, its audiences, and its relationship to the broader cultural field. This chapter traces these transformations, arguing that the history of musical technology in India is at the same time a history of cultural democratisation — the progressive widening of access to classical music — and of cultural standardisation — the homogenising effects of mass media on a tradition that had been shaped by regional diversity and intimate personal transmission.

6.1 The Gramophone and the First Mediation of Hindustani Sound

The gramophone arrived in India at the very beginning of the twentieth century, and within a decade it had transformed the social landscape of Hindustani music in ways whose consequences are still being worked out. The Gramophone Company's first Indian recordings, made in Calcutta in 1902 and 1903, included performances by some of the most celebrated musicians of the day — classical vocalists, instrumentalists, thumri singers — and were marketed with great commercial success to urban middle-class consumers.

The gramophone record was a revolutionary technology in the specific social context of early twentieth-century India because it separated the music from the social contexts in which it had previously been experienced. Classical music had been a fundamentally social and situational art: performed in the intimate context of the court durbar or the private baithak, heard in the presence of the musician, in the specific social atmosphere of a gathering of connoisseurs. The gramophone record replaced this experience with a disembodied sound that could be heard alone, in the domestic space of the middle-class home, without the social protocols of the court or the kotha.

This separation had multiple consequences. It made classical music accessible to a much wider social stratum than had previously been able to hear it — people who could not attend court performances or private baithaks could now own recordings by great masters. It created a new kind of listening subject: the solitary domestic listener who encounters music through a mechanical medium rather than a live social event. And it gave musicians a new incentive to perform in ways that worked effectively on record — which not always corresponded to what worked best in the live concert context.

The recording industry also had significant consequences for the social position of musicians. The ability to record and sell performances created a new income stream that partially compensated for the loss of court patronage, and the commercial success of recordings by certain musicians — Bade Ghulam Ali Khan's recordings for HMV were among the best-selling records in India in the 1940s and 1950s — provided a degree of financial security that had been unavailable in the patronage economy. At the same time, the mass reproduction of recorded performances altered the relationship between musical knowledge and social exclusivity: a gharana's cherished bandishes, once transmitted orally in conditions of strict secrecy, could now be heard by anyone who purchased the record.

6.2 All India Radio and the Making of a National Listener

The establishment and expansion of All India Radio from 1930 onwards represents the most significant single intervention in the social history of Hindustani music in the modern period. By the mid-1950s, AIR had become the primary medium through which most Indians encountered classical music, and its programming decisions had become the most powerful single factor shaping the social meaning and cultural status of the tradition.

AIR's significance lay not merely in the scale of its reach — by the 1960s it was broadcasting to tens of millions of listeners across the country — but in the specific kind of national cultural project it embodied. The nation-building project of the Nehru era understood culture as a domain of both unity and diversity: a means of creating a sense of common Indian identity while also celebrating the regional and linguistic diversity of the subcontinent. Classical music

— and Hindustani music in particular, as the prestige musical culture of the northern heartland — was central to this project, as the highest expression of an Indian musical heritage that transcended regional and religious divisions.

The practical consequences of AIR's commitment to classical music were significant. The regular broadcast of classical performances created a national audience for a musical form that had previously been accessible only to those with access to courts, private baithaks, or occasional public concerts. It created a listening public that, over several decades, developed a degree of musical literacy — a familiarity with the major ragas, the principal gharanas, and the norms of classical performance — that would not otherwise have existed.

But AIR's shaping role was not only positive. The bureaucratic and aesthetic norms of the radio institution tended towards standardisation and respectability in ways that privileged certain gharanas and styles over others. The AIR grading system rewarded musicians who fitted the institutional template of the dignified, technically accomplished classical artist, and penalised those whose style was too unusual, too emotional, or too associated with the marginal social spaces of the kotha and the bazaar.

6.3 Film Music and the Popularisation of Classical Forms

The relationship between Hindustani classical music and the Indian film industry is one of the most complex and contested areas of Indian musical culture. On one hand, the Hindi film industry, which became the dominant popular music medium of the twentieth century, drew extensively on

classical forms and classical musicians in the construction of its musical aesthetic. On the other hand, the incorporation of classical elements into film music involved a systematic simplification and popularisation that many classicists regarded as a distortion or degradation of the tradition.

The golden era of Hindi film music, roughly from the 1940s to the 1970s, was characterised by the prominent use of classical ragas as the basis for film songs. Music directors such as Naushad, S.D. Burman, Madan Mohan, and Roshan regularly based their compositions on specific ragas — Bhimpalasi, Yaman, Bhairav, Kafi — giving audiences a simplified but recognisable exposure to the emotional world of classical music. Many of the most celebrated film playback singers of the era — Lata Mangeshkar, Mohammad Rafi, Kishore Kumar — had received formal classical training, and brought a degree of classical sophistication to their film work that is absent from most contemporary film music.

The consequences for the classical tradition were ambivalent. Film music introduced millions of listeners to a simplified version of classical aesthetics, creating a population with some degree of familiarity with raga-based music and the emotional associations of specific ragas. This familiarity arguably created a larger potential audience for classical music than would otherwise have existed. But it also created a taste for the simplified, immediately accessible forms of classical music at the expense of the more demanding, slowly unfolding performances that constitute the classical tradition at its most characteristic.

6.4 Institutional Music Education and the New Amateur Musician

The expansion of institutional music education in the post-independence period — through university departments, music academies, state-funded conservatories, and the network of schools established in the tradition of Bhatkhande and Paluskar — has produced a significant transformation in the social base of Hindustani music. The most important consequence of this expansion is the emergence of what might be called the new amateur musician: an upper-middle-class urban Indian who has received formal classical music training, maintains an active practice of music making, and participates in the social world of classical music as both practitioner and audience member.

The new amateur musician is sociologically distinct from the hereditary professional in several important respects. Their musical practice is embedded in a different set of social institutions — the music school, the university, the suburban music class — rather than the hereditary household and the gurukul. Their relationship to music is shaped by different social incentives — the acquisition of cultural capital, the cultivation of spiritual depth, the expression of cultural identity

— rather than the professional imperatives of the hereditary musician. And their relationship to the gharana tradition is more flexible and eclectic: they may identify with a specific gharana's aesthetic but are less likely to maintain the exclusive loyalty to a single lineage that characterises the traditional guru-shishya relationship.

The social significance of the new amateur musician for the classical tradition is complex. On the positive side, the growth of this social category has created a larger audience for classical music, has provided a new economic base for music teachers and performers, and has helped to sustain the institutional infrastructure of the tradition in a period when state patronage has been declining. On the negative side, the aesthetic norms of the new amateur tend to favour accessibility and emotional expressiveness over technical rigour and stylistic depth, creating pressure on performers to simplify and popularise in ways that experienced musicians often find uncomfortable.

6.5 Digital Platforms and the Global Raga Listener

The emergence of digital music platforms — first the cassette and CD, then the internet, and most recently streaming services such as Spotify, Apple Music, and YouTube — has profoundly transformed the landscape of Hindustani music consumption in the twenty-first century. The consequences are multiple and in some respects contradictory.

On the most obvious level, digital platforms have dramatically increased the accessibility of classical music. The complete recordings of virtually every major Hindustani musician of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries are now available to anyone with an internet connection, anywhere in the world, at essentially no cost. For listeners in small towns and rural areas who have no access to live classical performances, for members of the Indian diaspora who want to maintain connection with the tradition, and for international listeners with no prior exposure to Hindustani music, this accessibility represents an extraordinary democratisation of cultural access.

The algorithmic recommendation systems of streaming platforms have created new patterns of musical discovery that differ fundamentally from the patterns created by AIR or the gramophone industry. A listener who begins by searching for 'Indian classical music' on YouTube may find themselves led, through a series of algorithmic recommendations, on a journey through multiple gharana styles, multiple instrumental traditions, and multiple historical periods that no single curator would have designed. This serendipitous exposure has, in some cases, created enthusiastic new audiences for previously marginal traditions and performers.

However, the same algorithms that create new audiences also tend to privilege certain kinds of content — shorter performances, more immediately accessible styles, pieces with a strong viral potential — over others. The three-hour concert recording that represents the classical tradition at its most characteristic is poorly adapted to the attention economy of the streaming era; it competes with shorter, more immediately accessible content on unfavourable terms. Several musicians interviewed for this research expressed concern that the streaming environment was creating pressure to record shorter, more easily consumable content at the expense of the extended, slowly unfolding performances that they regarded as the deepest expression of the tradition.

6.6 The Concert Hall, the Festival, and the Ritual of Classical Attendance

Despite the transformations wrought by recording and digital technology, the live concert remains the primary site of classical music experience for the dedicated audience. The social and aesthetic dimensions of live classical performance — the physical presence of the musician, the shared atmosphere of an engaged audience, the real-time development of a raga over several hours — are not reproducible through any recording medium, and the most committed listeners continue to seek out live performance as an irreplaceable experience.

The concert hall and the classical music festival have become the primary institutional contexts in which live classical performance is encountered in the contemporary period. Major festivals such as the Sawai Gandharva Bhimsen Festival in Pune, the Dhrupad Mela in Varanasi, the Tansen Samaroh in Gwalior, and the Jaipur Literature Festival's music component draw audiences of thousands over multiple days and nights of continuous performance. These festivals serve multiple social functions: as occasions for the gathering of the classical music community, as platforms for the establishment and maintenance of artistic reputations, and as rituals of communal engagement with the tradition.

The social composition of these festival audiences has changed significantly in recent decades. The traditional audience of connoisseurs — rasikas who have spent decades cultivating their musical knowledge and who can distinguish between the subtle stylistic choices of different gharana traditions — remains present, but is increasingly outnumbered by a more diverse audience that includes enthusiastic younger listeners, casual concertgoers attracted by the social occasion, and international tourists and diaspora visitors. This broadening of the audience has positive implications for the commercial sustainability of the tradition but creates challenges for the maintenance of the attentive, knowledgeable listening that the tradition at its deepest requires.

CHAPTER SEVEN: GLOBALISATION, DIASPORA, AND WORLD MUSIC

The globalisation of Hindustani music is not a recent phenomenon. The Mughal synthesis that produced the tradition in the first place was itself a form of cultural globalisation, bringing together musical traditions from across Eurasia. But the specific form of globalisation that concerns this chapter — the incorporation of Hindustani music into the circuits of international cultural exchange in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries — represents a qualitatively new development, one that has both extended the reach of the tradition and raised profound questions about its cultural identity and social meaning.

7.1 Ravi Shankar and the Internationalisation of the Sitar

The international career of Ravi Shankar (1920–2012) represents the single most important moment in the globalisation of Hindustani music. From his early collaborations with violinist Yehudi Menuhin in the 1950s through his celebrated encounter with the Beatles in the 1960s and his continuing career as the world's most recognisable Indian musician until his death, Shankar served as the primary ambassador of Hindustani music to the international public, introducing the raga tradition to audiences that had no prior framework for understanding it.

Shankar's achievement was remarkable by any measure. He brought Hindustani music to concert halls, universities, and rock festivals around the world; he produced recordings that sold in the millions; he collaborated with composers and musicians from Western classical music, jazz, and rock; and he established schools of Indian music in California and elsewhere that created the foundations for the international pedagogy of Hindustani music. He was, in the most literal sense, the figure who placed Indian classical music on the world cultural map.

But Shankar's globalisation strategy was not without its costs and complications. The requirement of explaining and contextualising an unfamiliar tradition to international audiences led to a degree of simplification and popularisation that some Indian musicians and scholars found troubling. The association of Hindustani music with the psychedelic counterculture of the 1960s — however commercially beneficial — created a set of stereotypical associations (Indian music as exotic, spiritual, mind-expanding) that reduced the tradition's complex social reality to a set of Western projections.

The question of Shankar's legacy within the Hindustani tradition itself is complex. His technical mastery — he was a disciple of Allaudin Khan, one of the supreme masters of the tradition — is beyond question, and many of the musicians he trained in his California schools have gone on to

make significant contributions to the tradition. But his international career took him away from the Indian classical music circuit for extended periods, and some Indian connoisseurs felt that the music he presented to international audiences was a simplified version of the tradition, designed for maximum accessibility rather than maximum depth.

7.2 The Indian Diaspora and the Transmission of Musical Identity

The Indian diaspora — estimated at over thirty million people worldwide, distributed across the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada, Australia, the Gulf states, and many other countries — represents a major social context for the international transmission of Hindustani music. For diaspora communities, classical music has served as a vehicle of cultural identity, a means of maintaining connection with a homeland while navigating the complexities of life in a new country.

The social functions of Hindustani music in diaspora contexts differ in important ways from its functions in India. In the homeland, classical music is embedded in a complex social field in which questions of caste, community, patronage, and institutional affiliation are all salient. In the diaspora, these social complexities are attenuated — the caste dynamics of the gharana system, for example, are less directly relevant in communities where the social infrastructure of the hereditary musician tradition is absent — and the tradition tends to function primarily as a marker of Indian cultural identity and a vehicle of intergenerational cultural transmission.

The diaspora has also been an important source of economic support for classical music. Diaspora audiences — particularly in the UK, USA, and Canada — regularly host touring Indian classical musicians, fund music schools and cultural organisations, and purchase recordings. In some cases, diaspora patronage has provided economic support for musicians and traditions that receive relatively little attention in India, including some of the more unusual or marginal vocal and instrumental traditions.

The relationship between diaspora musical practice and the Indian classical mainstream is complex and sometimes tense. Musicians trained in diaspora contexts may not receive the same level of recognition in India as those trained through the traditional gurukul system; their accents, their repertoire choices, and their performance styles may not conform to the aesthetic norms that Indian connoisseurs expect. Conversely, some diaspora musicians have achieved significant recognition in India on the basis of technical mastery and innovative musical thinking, demonstrating that geographical distance from the Indian classical mainstream need not preclude artistic excellence.

7.3 Fusion Music and the Politics of Cultural Encounter

The encounter between Hindustani music and musical traditions from other parts of the world has produced a rich body of fusion music, ranging from the Indo-jazz experiments of the 1960s to the contemporary global crossover projects of musicians such as Anoushka Shankar, Niladri Kumar, and Shubha Mudgal. This music occupies a contested cultural space: celebrated by advocates of cultural dialogue and cosmopolitan creativity, criticised by purists who see it as a dilution or corruption of the classical tradition.

The critical discourse surrounding fusion music often reproduces a dichotomy between authentic tradition and corrupting modernity that this thesis has argued is analytically inadequate. The Hindustani tradition has always been a product of cultural encounters — the Islamic synthesis that produced the khyal form was itself a kind of fusion. The question is not whether cultural encounters are desirable or undesirable in the abstract, but whether specific fusions are musically and culturally productive — whether they create new expressive possibilities without sacrificing the distinctive qualities of the traditions they bring together.

Evaluated by this criterion, the results of fusion experiments are mixed. At their best — the collaborations of Ravi Shankar with Yehudi Menuhin, the work of Shakti with John McLaughlin, certain recordings by Hariprasad Chaurasia

— fusion projects have created genuinely new musical languages that draw on the distinctive strengths of both traditions. At their worst, they produce a homogenised world-music product in which the specific cultural intelligence of each tradition is dissolved into a generic aesthetic of accessible exoticism.

The political dimensions of fusion are also important. Collaborations between Western and Indian musicians typically occur within an asymmetrical global cultural economy in which Western cultural forms set the terms of the encounter. The Indian musician who performs with a Western rock band or records for a Western world music label is generally operating within a framework of cultural norms — the concert format, the record industry structure, the promotional apparatus — that is Western in origin, and is implicitly evaluated by aesthetic standards derived from Western musical values. Navigating these asymmetries while maintaining the integrity of one's musical tradition is one of the central challenges facing Indian classical musicians who engage with the global music market.

7.4 Western Classical Crossovers and the Question of Equivalence

A specific form of the fusion question concerns the relationship between Hindustani and Western classical music. Both traditions claim the status of sophisticated, highly developed systems of musical thought with deep histories and complex social functions; both have been celebrated as among the highest expressions of human musical intelligence. Their encounter raises the question of what it means to compare musical traditions across fundamentally different cultural frameworks, and whether the category of 'classical music' can meaningfully bridge the two.

The collaborations between Ravi Shankar and Philip Glass, the experiments of violinist L. Subramaniam with Western orchestras, and the ongoing work of musicians who have trained in both traditions have demonstrated that the two musical systems can be brought into productive dialogue, at least in the hands of musicians with the depth and skill to understand both from the inside. These experiments have also highlighted the fundamental differences between the traditions: the Hindustani emphasis on improvisation and real-time melodic development, the central role of the raga as an organisational framework, and the specific time structures of tala all create performance situations that are quite different from the score-based, conductor-led ensemble of the Western classical tradition.

The institutional contexts in which these crossovers occur are significant. When a Hindustani musician performs at Carnegie Hall or the Royal Albert Hall, they are performing in a space designed for the presentation of Western classical music, before an audience accustomed to Western concert norms, within a promotional framework that positions the music as world music — an exotic other to the Western classical mainstream. These contextual factors shape the reception of the music and the cultural positioning of the tradition in ways that are not always in the interest of the tradition's own integrity.

7.5 Hindustani Music in the World Music Market

The world music market — the loosely defined commercial category that emerged in the late 1980s to describe non-Western popular and traditional musics marketed to Western audiences — has been both a vehicle of exposure and a source of distortion for Hindustani music. The world music label provides a commercial framework through which Indian classical recordings can be distributed and promoted in Western markets; it provides a context in which international listeners can encounter and appreciate the tradition; and it has supported the careers of several musicians who might otherwise have had limited access to Western concert halls and record companies.

But the world music market also imposes constraints. It privileges accessibility and immediate emotional impact over the slow, demanding unfolding that characterises the classical tradition at its depth. It tends to favour hybrid and fusion projects over pure classical performance. It subjects the music to the commercial logic of a global cultural industry in which the cultural specificity of any particular tradition is a selling point — a mark of exotic difference to be exploited — rather than a value to be respected on its own terms.

The sociological literature on world music — including the classic debates between Steven Feld and Paul Simon, the critiques of ethnomusicologists such as Philip Bohlman and Steven Guilbault, and the more recent interventions of scholars such as Sujatha Fernandes on global music circulation — provides a useful framework for analysing the position of Hindustani music in the global cultural economy. The consistent finding of this literature is that world music markets tend to reproduce, rather than challenge, the global cultural hierarchies that position Western popular music as the universal standard against which all other musics are measured as more or less exotic.

CHAPTER EIGHT: CONCLUSION — THE LIVING TRADITION

8.1 Summary of Key Findings

This thesis has pursued a sustained inquiry into Hindustani Classical Music as a social institution: its historical formation, its mechanisms of cultural transmission, its relationship to social hierarchies of caste and gender, its encounter with colonial modernity, and its negotiation of the challenges of technological change and cultural globalisation. The analysis has been guided throughout by the conviction that music is not merely an aesthetic object but a social practice — a mode of action through which communities reproduce themselves, contest social hierarchies, negotiate cultural identities, and sustain forms of knowledge and experience that cannot easily be accommodated within the dominant categories of modernity.

The principal empirical findings of the research can be summarised as follows. The gharana system, while significantly altered by the loss of court patronage, the expansion of institutional music education, and the effects of recording and digital technology, continues to function as the primary institutional mechanism of musical transmission and as the primary vehicle of social identity in the classical music world. The guru-shishya relationship, despite the pressures created by the institutional music education system, retains its centrality for the deepest levels of musical transmission. The gendered history of the tradition — the complex legacy of the tawaif, the nationalist suppression of female performance, and the emergence of a new generation of women classical musicians — continues to shape the social dynamics of the contemporary music world in ways that are not always fully acknowledged.

The democratising effects of recording technology, broadcasting, and institutional music education have significantly widened the social base of Hindustani music, creating new audiences and new communities of practice while raising questions about the effects of standardisation and popularisation on the quality and depth of the tradition. The globalisation of the tradition through the diaspora, fusion music, and the world music market has extended its geographical reach while creating new forms of cultural asymmetry and new pressures towards commercial simplification.

8.2 The Paradox of the Venerated Margin

The central theoretical argument of the thesis is that Hindustani Classical Music occupies a position of paradoxical social significance in contemporary India: simultaneously at the centre and at the margin of the cultural field. It is venerated in official discourse as the pinnacle of Indian musical culture and a great national heritage; it is marginalised in the actual distribution of media attention, commercial investment, and cultural consumption. It is claimed by Hindu nationalism as an expression of Hindu civilisational genius; it is deeply shaped by Islamic cultural influences that are inseparable from its most important genres and forms. It is associated with the highest social prestige of connoisseurship and cultural capital; it is performed by communities whose social status has historically been ambiguous or degraded. It celebrates the intimacy of the guru-shishya relationship and the irreplaceable depth of oral transmission; it is increasingly mediated by digital technologies that fundamentally alter the conditions of musical encounter and transmission.

This paradoxical position is not, the thesis argues, a sign of crisis or decadence. It is, rather, the condition of vitality. The capacity of the Hindustani tradition to sustain contradictions — to be simultaneously sacred and secular, Hindu and Islamic, elite and popular, ancient and contemporary — is precisely the source of its resilience. A tradition that could only survive in a single, stable social configuration would be far more vulnerable to the disruptions of historical change than one that can adapt itself to multiple social configurations while maintaining its essential identity.

The concept of the 'living tradition' invoked in the title of this chapter is intended to capture this paradoxical vitality. A living tradition is not a static preservation of the past; it is a dynamic negotiation between inherited forms and changing social conditions. The negotiations that are currently underway in the world of Hindustani music — between traditional and institutional transmission, between classical depth and popular accessibility, between national heritage and global circulation — are not betrayals of the tradition but expressions of it.

8.3 Implications for Cultural Policy

The analysis presented in this thesis has several implications for cultural policy in India and for the international cultural policies of institutions that engage with classical music from the global South.

At the national level, the most important policy implication concerns the relationship between institutional support and organic transmission. The state has provided crucial support for Hindustani music through All India Radio, the Sangeet Natak Akademi, university music departments, and various fellowship and award schemes. This support has been essential for the survival of the tradition in the post-patronage era. But the analysis suggests that institutional support can also distort the tradition, by privileging the aspects of musical life that are most compatible with bureaucratic norms — reproducible, assessable, certifiable musical knowledge — at the expense of the oral, embodied, personalised transmission that is the deepest vehicle of the tradition's most distinctive qualities.

Cultural policy needs to find ways of supporting the guru-shishya relationship and the gurukul system, not merely as a museum piece but as a living institution that continues to produce the deepest levels of musical transmission. This requires financial support for traditional gurus and their students, protection of the time and space that intensive musical practice requires, and resistance to the pressure — from both the market and the institutional education system — to standardise and simplify the tradition in the name of accessibility.

The policy implications for gender equity are also significant. The analysis has documented persistent structural inequalities in the access of women musicians to the highest levels of training, the most prestigious performance opportunities, and the fullest recognition as transmitters of the tradition. Cultural policy at every level should actively address these inequalities, including through targeted support for women musicians, inclusion of gender equity considerations in the evaluation of cultural institutions, and engagement with the historical legacy of the tawaif suppression.

8.4 Directions for Further Research

This thesis has opened several lines of inquiry that it has not been possible to pursue to their conclusion within the available space. Future research might profitably develop several of these threads.

First, a more systematic comparative study of the gharana system across different instrumental and vocal traditions would be valuable. This thesis has focused primarily on the vocal tradition; systematic comparison with the transmission practices of instrumental gharanas — the sitar tradition of the Imdadkhani gharana, the sarod tradition of the Senia-Maihar gharana, the table tradition of the Lucknow and Delhi gharanas — would allow a more complete picture of the institutional structures of the tradition to emerge.

Second, a longitudinal study of the effects of digital technology on musical transmission and listening practices would be timely. The research for this thesis was conducted at a particular moment of rapid technological change, when the implications of streaming culture for classical music were still being worked out. A follow-up study conducted in five or ten years' time would allow an assessment of whether the trends identified here have continued, accelerated, or been reversed.

Third, comparative research on the globalisation of Hindustani music that includes perspectives from musicians and listeners in Western countries and in the Indian diaspora, and that is attentive to the asymmetries of the global cultural economy identified in Chapter Seven, would deepen the analysis of the international dimensions of the tradition.

Fourth, and perhaps most importantly, sustained ethnographic research on the experience of learning in the contemporary period — what it means to be a student of classical music in the age of YouTube and social media, how young musicians navigate the relationship between traditional transmission and digital culture, how the guru-shishya relationship is being renegotiated in the context of globalised musical education — would illuminate the most dynamic front in the living tradition of Hindustani music.

The tradition whose history and social life this thesis has sought to illuminate is, as the preceding chapters have demonstrated, resilient, adaptive, and inexhaustibly rich. The ragas that Tansen sang in the court of Akbar, that Bade Ghulam Ali Khan recorded for HMV in Calcutta, that Bhimsen Joshi performed through five decades of inimitable artistry, and that a new generation of musicians is now taking into forms and contexts that their predecessors could not have imagined — these ragas carry within them the accumulated aesthetic intelligence of centuries, a form of knowledge that is irreplaceable and that the world cannot afford to lose. It is the hope of this thesis that the sociological understanding of the tradition it offers may contribute, however modestly, to its sustained survival and flourishing.

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Interview Data

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Interview Schedule — Semi-Structured Interview Guide The following questions formed the basis of semi-structured interviews conducted with practising musicians.

Questions were adapted for different participant categories (musicologists, patrons, students, policy makers).

Section 1: Background and Training Please describe your musical background and how you came to classical music. How would you characterise your relationship with your primary guru/teacher? How do you identify yourself in relation to the gharana tradition — do you belong to a specific gharana, and what does that membership mean to you?

How did you receive your primary musical training—through a traditional guru-shishya arrangement, through institutional education, or some combination?

Section 2: The Gharana and Transmission How would you describe the role of the gharana in your

musical life and professional identity? Do you think the gharana system is changing? If so, how, and with what consequences for the tradition? How do you transmit your own knowledge to students? How similar is your approach to your own training? What do you see as the most important things that cannot be transmitted through recorded music or institutional education?

Section 3: Social and Cultural Dimensions

How do you understand the relationship between classical music and Hindu cultural identity? And between classical music and the Islamic/Sufi dimensions of the tradition? How has the social position of the classical musician changed in your lifetime or professional experience? What role do you think classical music should play in contemporary Indian society?

Section 4: Technology and the Contemporary Scene How has digital technology changed the way you practise, perform, and transmit music? How do you think about the relationship between live performance and recorded music? What do you see as the most significant challenges facing Hindustani classical music today? What gives you hope for the future of the tradition?

Appendix B: List of Fieldwork Sites The following institutions and venues were visited in the course of fieldwork (2024–2025):

Delhi: Sangeet Natak Akademi; India Habitat Centre; India International Centre; Kathak Kendra; Gandharva Mahavidyalaya; multiple private residences and teaching studios.

Mumbai: National Centre for the Performing Arts (NCPA); Bhulabhai Desai Memorial Institute; Sawai Gandharva Bhimsen Festival (conducted in Pune, attended by Mumbai-based musicians and audience members); multiple private residences and teaching studios.

Kolkata: Dover Lane Music Conference; Rabindra Bharati University Faculty of Music; Sangit Research Academy; Sangit Mahavidyalaya; multiple private residences.

Varanasi: Banaras Hindu University Faculty of Performing Arts; Dhrupad Mela; Sankat Mochan Sangit Samaroh; multiple private teaching settings.

Jaipur: Jaipur-Atrauli Gharana teaching studio; Jawahar Kala Kendra; Rajasthan Sangeet Natak Akademi; Jaipur Literature Festival music programming.

Appendix C: Note on Transcription and Translation

All interviews were conducted in the language preferred by the participant: English (27 interviews), Hindi (24 interviews), Urdu (7 interviews), Bengali (3 interviews), and Marathi (2 interviews). Non-English interviews were transcribed in the original language and subsequently translated by the researcher, with the assistance of a professional translator for the Bengali and Marathi interviews.

Musical terms in the body of the thesis have been transliterated following the conventions of the Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians: Indian Music supplement. Diacritical marks have been omitted in the main text for readability but are included in the Glossary. Technical terms appear in italics on their first occurrence in each chapter.

Quotations from Hindi and Urdu interviews have been translated into idiomatic English; where a specific term or phrase in the original language is particularly significant, the original is given in parentheses following the translation.

CHAPTER NINE: PEDAGOGY, EMBODIMENT, AND THE DIGITAL AGE

The question of how musical knowledge is transmitted has always been central to the social history of Hindustani music. The gurukul model — in which the student resided in the teacher's household, absorbing the texture of a musical life through immersive proximity — was not merely a pedagogical arrangement but an epistemological one: a way of knowing through being, of acquiring through inhabiting. The anxieties surrounding contemporary pedagogical change are not simply conservative reactions to novelty; they reflect genuine uncertainty about whether the particular forms of knowledge that the tradition prizes most deeply can survive the transformation of the conditions in which they have historically been produced.

This chapter examines the pedagogical dimensions of the tradition in greater depth than earlier chapters have allowed, tracing the relationship between particular conceptions of musical knowledge and the social institutions through which that knowledge is transmitted. The chapter situates contemporary debates about digital pedagogy — online lessons, YouTube tutorials, app-based learning — within the longer history of pedagogical innovation in the tradition, arguing that the current moment is best understood not as a rupture with traditional transmission but as the latest in a series of transformations that have repeatedly altered the conditions of musical learning without destroying the tradition's capacity for self-renewal.

9.1 The Epistemology of Oral Transmission

The oral transmission of musical knowledge in the Hindustani tradition is grounded in a set of philosophical commitments about the nature of musical understanding that deserve explicit examination. The central commitment is to the primacy of embodied knowledge: the conviction that the most important musical knowledge cannot be rendered in propositional form, cannot be adequately notated, and cannot be fully captured in any medium that separates the knowledge from the body that produces and receives it. This commitment has roots in the broader Indian philosophical tradition's scepticism about the capacity of language and conceptual thought to capture the most important dimensions of experience — a scepticism expressed across a wide range of domains from Vedantic epistemology to yogic practice.

In the specific context of musical pedagogy, this commitment to embodied knowledge manifests in the practice of riyaz — daily disciplined practice — as the foundational activity of the musician's life. The word riyaz derives from the Arabic riyadha, meaning exercise or training, and the concept it names in the Hindustani context is not merely technical drill but a form of physical and mental discipline through which the musician's body is gradually transformed into a reliable vehicle for musical expression. The great masters of the tradition are universally described as having maintained riyaz disciplines of extraordinary intensity: practising for six, eight, even twelve hours daily over decades, with the result that certain musical capacities — the ability to sustain a note with perfect intonation, to execute a complex taan pattern without conscious effort, to hear and respond to the subtle shifts of a raga's emotional character — become automatic, ingrained in the body below the level of conscious intention.

The epistemological implications of this pedagogy of riyaz are significant. They suggest a conception of musical knowledge as inseparable from the particular body that has been shaped by years of disciplined practice to produce and receive it — a conception that challenges the abstracted, transferable conception of knowledge that underpins most Western models of education, including the institutional music education systems that were introduced in India under colonial influence. The notation system developed by Bhatkhande, however practically valuable, rests on a representationalist conception of musical knowledge — the assumption that music can be adequately captured in written symbols — that is fundamentally at odds with the oral tradition's insistence on the irreducibility of embodied, contextual knowing.

9.2 The Gurukul and Its Discontents

The idealisation of the gurukul system in the discourse of classical music has sometimes obscured the tensions and contradictions that have always been part of it. Interview data gathered for this research reveals a more complex picture than the hagiographic accounts of the tradition typically allow. Many musicians describe formative relationships with gurus that were, in retrospect, experienced as simultaneously enabling and constraining — relationships in which the gift of musical knowledge was accompanied by demands for personal service, social deference, and sometimes financial dependency that many contemporary students find difficult to accept.

The question of what constitutes acceptable pedagogical authority is actively contested in the contemporary music world. On one side are those who insist that the traditional forms of guru-shishya relationship — including the student's submission to the guru's authority in non-musical as well as musical matters — are inseparable from the depth of transmission they make possible. On the other side are those who argue that a more egalitarian, professionally bounded pedagogical relationship is both ethically necessary and musically sufficient. This debate is not merely about teaching methods; it reflects deeper disagreements about the nature of musical knowledge, the social conditions of its transmission, and the relationship between artistic excellence and personal character.

Several of the most thoughtful interlocutors in this research described what might be called a negotiated gurukul: a pedagogical relationship that preserves the core of the traditional model — the intensive, personalised, holistic transmission of musical knowledge — while adapting its social form to the realities of contemporary life. In these arrangements, the student does not typically reside in the guru's household, but maintains regular intensive contact over many years; the relationship involves a degree of personal commitment and mutual trust that goes beyond the transactional; and the transmission of musical knowledge is understood as inseparable from the transmission of musical values and aesthetic sensibility. Whether this negotiated model can sustain the depth of transmission that the traditional gurukul achieved at its best is a question that only time and careful observation can answer.

9.3 Digital Tools and the Transformation of Riyaz

Digital technology has transformed the daily practice environment of the contemporary Hindustani musician in ways that would have been unimaginable to previous generations. The electronic tanpura — a software application that provides the continuous drone accompaniment that is the fundamental sonic environment of Indian music practice — has largely replaced the acoustic instrument in the practice rooms of most contemporary students. The electronic tabla and

pakhawaj applications that provide rhythmic accompaniment for solo practice have similarly transformed the experience of practising with rhythm. Recording and playback facilities that were once available only in professional studios are now carried in every smartphone, allowing musicians to review and analyse their own practice with an immediacy and precision that was previously impossible.

The responses of practising musicians to these digital tools are varied and nuanced. Many welcome the convenience and accessibility of electronic practice tools, noting that they make it possible to practise in hotel rooms, on tour, or in circumstances where an acoustic tanpura would be unavailable. The ability to slow down recordings for detailed analysis of ornamental passages, to loop difficult sections, and to record and immediately replay one's own performance has been welcomed as a powerful aid to detailed technical work. Several musicians described using spectral analysis software to study the precise intonation of historical recordings, accessing a level of analytical detail that was previously available only to those with specialised acoustic training.

Yet the same musicians frequently expressed reservations about the deeper consequences of digital practice environments. The electronic tanpura, for all its convenience, lacks the subtle acoustic properties of the acoustic instrument — the overtone richness, the slight variations of pitch and timbre, the physical resonance — that have traditionally been understood to train the musician's ear to the finest levels of intonational sensitivity. Practising in a digital acoustic environment, some argued, might produce musicians whose technical facility was high but whose sensitivity to the subtle intonational world of the raga was correspondingly diminished. Whether this concern reflects genuine acoustic reality or a nostalgic idealisation of traditional materials is difficult to assess without systematic comparative research, but it points to a set of questions about the relationship between the physical environment of practice and the quality of musical knowledge produced that deserve sustained empirical investigation.

9.4 Online Teaching and the Pandemic Transformation

The COVID-19 pandemic of 2020–2022 constituted an unplanned experiment in online musical pedagogy of extraordinary scale. When in-person teaching became impossible, classical musicians across India and the world were forced to adapt to online teaching platforms with little preparation and no established pedagogical models to follow. The results were, by general consensus among the musicians interviewed for this research, mixed: sufficient to maintain basic musical relationships and transmit certain kinds of musical content, but deeply inadequate for the most important dimensions of musical transmission.

The specific problems of online music teaching in the Hindustani context are instructive about the embodied character of the tradition's knowledge. The most fundamental is the audio latency problem: the unavoidable delay in internet audio transmission makes it impossible for guru and student to play or sing simultaneously, eliminating the possibility of the real-time musical dialogue — call and response, correction and demonstration — that is the basic unit of live musical instruction. The compression and processing of audio in standard video conferencing platforms also degrades the subtle intonational information on which the fine-grained transmission of raga character depends. And the physical absence of the teacher removes the possibility of physical demonstration and correction — the guru's ability to place a student's hand correctly on the tanpura strings, to indicate by physical gesture the precise quality of a meend (glide) they are seeking — that is a fundamental element of embodied musical pedagogy.

Yet the pandemic period also revealed unexpected possibilities. Several musicians described developing new ways of working within the constraints of online teaching: using pre-recorded demonstrations supplemented by live commentary, developing more explicit verbal descriptions of musical qualities that in-person teaching would have conveyed through imitation, and using the availability of recordings and online resources to complement direct instruction in ways that enriched rather than impoverished the pedagogical experience. The pandemic forced a pedagogical self-consciousness — an explicit articulation of musical knowledge that oral tradition had previously allowed to remain implicit — that some teachers found unexpectedly valuable. Whether this enforced explicitness enriches or distorts the tradition's mode of knowing remains an open question.

9.5 The YouTube Generation and Self-Directed Learning

The emergence of a generation of musicians who have learned substantial portions of their musical knowledge through YouTube and other digital platforms represents a genuinely new development in the social history of Hindustani music. For the first time, it is possible to develop a serious engagement with the classical tradition outside of any formal pedagogical relationship — to learn ragas, study performances, and develop musical taste through the independent exploration of a vast digital archive. This development raises profound questions about the relationship between individual agency and institutional transmission in the reproduction of the tradition.

The reception of self-directed digital learners by the established classical music world is characteristically ambivalent. On one hand, the enthusiasm and musical commitment of young people who have discovered the tradition through digital means is widely welcomed as evidence

of the tradition's continuing vitality and expanding reach. On the other hand, experienced musicians frequently express concern about the musical formation of young people whose primary musical education has been mediated by algorithms rather than gurus — whose taste has been shaped by what is popular on YouTube rather than what is considered most profound by connoisseurs; whose technical development has proceeded without the corrective guidance of an experienced teacher; and whose musical identity may be eclectic and unrooted in the way that gharana-trained musicians' identities are not.

9.6 Towards Pedagogy for the Contemporary Period

The analysis of this chapter suggests that the pedagogical challenge facing Hindustani music in the digital age is not simply one of adapting traditional methods to new technologies. It is more fundamentally a challenge of identifying what is irreducible in the tradition's pedagogical wisdom — what forms of musical knowledge genuinely require embodied, relational, live transmission — and designing pedagogical models that protect and sustain these irreducible elements while taking intelligent advantage of what digital tools genuinely offer.

Several of the most thoughtful practitioners encountered in this research are engaged in precisely this project of pedagogical design. They are developing hybrid models that combine intensive residential learning periods with digital follow-up; creating structured archives of pedagogical recordings that preserve the demonstrations and explanations of master teachers in ways that can be accessed between lessons; and developing communities of practice — online and in-person — in which students learning in geographically dispersed contexts can maintain the social and aesthetic connections that are an important part of the traditional learning environment. These experiments do not yet add up to a coherent alternative to the traditional gurukul, but they represent a serious engagement with the pedagogical realities of the contemporary period that deserves scholarly attention and institutional support.

CHAPTER TEN: THE SPIRITUAL DIMENSIONS OF RAGA—AESTHETICS, DEVOTION, AND TRANSCENDENCE

Any sociological account of Hindustani music that confines itself to institutional structures, social hierarchies, and market forces risks missing something essential about the tradition. The musicians, listeners, and scholars encountered throughout this research consistently pointed to a dimension of the tradition that resists sociological reduction: the dimension of spiritual experience, of transcendence, of what the Sanskrit tradition calls nada yoga — the path to self-realisation through sound. To ignore this dimension in the name of analytical rigour would be

not merely incomplete but actively misleading, for it is precisely the spiritual authority attributed to music that has sustained the tradition through centuries of social upheaval and that continues to motivate the extraordinary commitment of its practitioners and devotees.

This chapter does not attempt to adjudicate the metaphysical claims of the tradition — to determine whether ragas truly possess the cosmic properties attributed to them in the ancient treatises, or whether musical experience can genuinely produce the states of spiritual realisation that the tradition's most elevated practitioners describe. These are questions that lie outside the competence of social science. What the chapter does attempt is a sociological and phenomenological analysis of the spiritual dimensions of musical experience as they are described by practitioners, audiences, and theorists, and an examination of the social functions served by the spiritual framework within which the tradition understands itself.

10.1 Nada Brahman: The Metaphysics of Sound

The concept of Nada Brahman — literally "sound as ultimate reality" or "Brahman as sound" — is the foundational metaphysical concept of Indian musical philosophy. The concept holds that primordial sound (anahat nada, the unstruck sound) is not merely a physical phenomenon but the vibrational ground of all existence — the creative energy through which Brahman, the ultimate reality, expresses itself in the manifest world. Audible sound (ahat nada, struck sound) is the worldly echo of this cosmic vibration, and music — disciplined, intentional, cosmologically oriented sound — is the human practice that most directly participates in the cosmic creative process.

The practical implications of Nada Brahman for musical practice are extensive. If music is a form of cosmic participation rather than merely aesthetic entertainment, then the musician's discipline is a form of spiritual practice — a discipline of consciousness as well as of technique. The requirement of daily riyaz, the expectation of lifelong dedication, the subordination of personal ego to the demands of the raga — these practical imperatives of the musical life are all sustained, in the traditional framework, by the conviction that musical mastery is a spiritual achievement whose significance extends beyond the concert hall into the deepest dimensions of human experience.

The social functions of this metaphysical framework are multiple. It provides the primary motivational structure for the extraordinary labour of classical musical training — the decades of daily practice that mastery requires are sustained, in part, by the conviction that they serve ends beyond personal achievement or professional success. It provides a framework of evaluation that

places the deepest forms of musical experience — the experience of raga as a living presence, of a great performance as a spiritual event — above the more superficial pleasures of technical display. And it provides a basis for solidarity across the tradition's social divisions: in the moment of deep musical experience, caste, religion, and social position are dissolved in the shared participation in something that transcends them all.

10.2 Rasa Theory and the Social Life of Aesthetic Emotion

The rasa theory introduced in Chapter Two provides the primary framework for understanding the spiritual and emotional dimensions of Hindustani musical experience. The concept of rasa — aesthetic emotion, literally "taste" or "essence" — is not a description of the performer's private emotional state but a quality of aesthetic experience that arises in the encounter between a prepared performer and a prepared audience. Rasa is, in this sense, inherently social: it cannot be produced by a performer in the absence of a receptive audience, and it cannot be experienced by a listener in the absence of a performer capable of creating the conditions for its arising.

The social implications of rasa theory for the organisation of musical culture are significant. The theory implies a division between the sahridaya — the cultivated listener capable of aesthetic reception — and the uncultivated listener who cannot participate in the aesthetic experience the performance is creating. This division is not merely an empirical observation about differences in aesthetic sensitivity; it is a normative claim about the conditions of genuine musical experience, one that carries implications for how musical education, musical patronage, and the social organisation of musical performance should be structured. The ideal of the rasika — the connoisseur-listener who has cultivated the aesthetic sensitivity to participate fully in the experience of a great performance — has been one of the most powerful ideals in the social world of Hindustani music, shaping the norms of concert behaviour, the criteria of musical evaluation, and the social stratification of the listening audience.

10.3 The Sufi Tradition and the Mysticism of Sound

The Islamic spiritual tradition that shaped Hindustani music most profoundly was not orthodox Sunni Islam but the Sufi mystical tradition, and particularly the Chishti silsila whose most celebrated saint, Hazrat Nizamuddin Auliya, was the spiritual master of Amir Khusrau. The Chishti order placed an unusual emphasis on music as a vehicle of spiritual experience, institutionalised in the practice of Sama — the spiritual concert in which music, poetry, and devotional attention are combined to produce altered states of consciousness understood as proximity to God.

The Sufi concept of hal — the spiritual state induced by musical experience, which can range from contemplative inwardness to ecstatic physical movement — provided a framework for understanding intense musical response that complemented and enriched the rasa theory of the Hindu tradition. Where rasa theory emphasises the aesthetic contemplation of purified emotional states, the Sufi framework emphasises the dissolution of self in the experience of divine proximity — a more radical claim about the transformative power of music that has left its mark on the emotional vocabulary of the Hindustani tradition, particularly in the thumri and ghazal forms that developed most directly from the kotha and Sufi contexts.

The persistence of Sufi musical culture in the contemporary period — the continuing vitality of the qawwali tradition, the crowds that gather at Sufi shrines for musical events that combine devotional and aesthetic functions — testifies to the enduring power of the spiritual framework that the Islamic mystic tradition contributed to Hindustani musical culture. At a time when the composite, syncretic character of the tradition is increasingly contested by Hindu nationalist discourse, the Sufi dimensions of the tradition serve as a powerful reminder that its greatness is inseparable from the cultural synthesis that produced it.

10.4 The Bhakti Movement and Devotional Music

The bhakti movement — the devotional tradition that swept across North India from the fifteenth to the seventeenth centuries, producing a body of vernacular devotional poetry and music that transformed the religious landscape of the subcontinent — has left deep traces in the Hindustani classical tradition. The poet-saints of the bhakti movement — Kabir, Mirabai, Tukaram, Surdas, Tulsidas — were composers as well as poets, and their compositions were set to ragas that are still performed in the classical tradition today. The devotional texts of the bhakti tradition are among the most important in the khyal and thumri repertoires, and the bhakti aesthetics of personal devotion, emotional surrender, and the erasure of social boundaries in the experience of divine love have profoundly shaped the emotional vocabulary of Hindustani performance.

The bhakti tradition is also significant for its relationship to caste. The most celebrated bhakti saints were often of low-caste origin — Kabir was a weaver, Ravidas was a cobbler — and the movement's central spiritual claim was that divine grace was available to all regardless of caste, that the personal experience of devotion was more important than ritual purity or social status. This egalitarian spiritual vision has informed some of the most democratic impulses in the history of Hindustani musical culture, providing a counter-narrative to the caste-hierarchical dimension of the gharana system and a spiritual authority for the claim that musical excellence transcends social categories.

10.5 Spirituality and the Contemporary Musician

How do contemporary classical musicians understand the spiritual dimensions of their art? This question was a recurring theme in the interviews conducted for this research, and the responses reveal a rich diversity of positions that resists simple characterisation. Very few musicians interviewed would have described themselves as indifferent to the spiritual dimensions of the tradition; virtually none spoke about their music in purely aesthetic or technical terms. But the specific forms that spiritual engagement takes vary enormously: from the explicitly devotional framework of musicians who understand their art as a form of Hindu or Islamic worship, to the more diffuse spirituality of those who describe music as a path of self-cultivation and inner development, to the phenomenological accounts of those who emphasise the qualitative character of deep musical experience without reference to any particular religious framework.

One dimension that cuts across these diverse positions is the near-universal emphasis on the experience of what musicians variously describe as samadhi, wajd, or simply a state of deep absorption — a quality of musical concentration in which the boundary between the musician and the music dissolves, in which the performance takes on a life of its own beyond conscious intention, and in which the experience of time is radically altered. This experience, described in strikingly similar terms by musicians of very different religious backgrounds and aesthetic orientations, constitutes something like the phenomenological core of advanced musical practice in the Hindustani tradition: the experience that practitioners regard as both the goal of musical discipline and its ultimate justification.

CHAPTER ELEVEN: HINDUSTANI MUSIC AND THE POLITICS OF HERITAGE — NATIONALISM, COMMODIFICATION, AND PRESERVATION

The concept of heritage — the selective identification of cultural practices, objects, and traditions as valuable inheritances to be preserved and transmitted to future generations — is a modern construction, even when the practices it designates are ancient. The creation of Hindustani Classical Music as national heritage is a process that began in the late nineteenth century and continues in the present day, and it has had profound consequences for the social meaning of the tradition, the institutional frameworks through which it is sustained, and the political uses to which it has been put. This chapter examines the politics of musical heritage across three dimensions: the nationalist appropriation of the tradition; its commodification in the global cultural economy; and the institutional practices of preservation and archiving that seek to protect it against the ravages of time and market forces.

11.1 Heritage, Memory, and the Politics of the Past

The concept of heritage, as theorised by scholars such as David Lowenthal, Laurajane Smith, and Rodney Harrison, is always a present-tense activity: a selection from the past in the service of present needs and future aspirations. What is designated as heritage — what is identified as worth preserving, celebrating, and transmitting — reflects the interests, values, and power relations of those doing the designating, not simply the objective cultural importance of the designated practices or objects. The inclusion of Hindustani Classical Music in the category of national heritage is therefore not simply a recognition of the tradition's intrinsic value; it is a political act with specific social consequences.

In the Indian context, the designation of classical music as national heritage has consistently served the interests of the educated urban upper-middle class — the social stratum most closely associated with classical music patronage, institutional music education, and the cultivation of connoisseurship — by giving their cultural preferences the sanction of national importance. It has served the interests of the post-independence Indian state by providing a cultural narrative of civilisational continuity that could be mobilised both domestically and in international cultural diplomacy. And it has served the interests of Hindu nationalism by providing a prestigious cultural tradition that can be claimed as authentically Indian — which in the rhetoric of Hindu nationalism means authentically Hindu — in ways that resist the cultural hegemony of the West.

11.2 The Sangeet Natak Akademi and the State's Relationship to the Tradition

The Sangeet Natak Akademi, established in 1952 as the national academy for music, dance, and drama, is the primary institutional expression of the Indian state's commitment to the classical performing arts. Its activities encompass the conferring of national awards (the Sangeet Natak Akademi Awards and the Ratna Sadsya fellowships), the funding of performance and documentation projects, the maintenance of archives of recordings and manuscripts, and the support of institutional music education. Its annual awards — widely regarded as the most prestigious recognition available to a Hindustani musician — have become a significant instrument of cultural authority, establishing and maintaining the reputational hierarchy of the classical music world.

Research conducted at the Akademi's archives, combined with interviews with current and former officials, suggests a complex relationship between the institution and the musical traditions it is mandated to support. The Akademi has made genuine contributions to the preservation and promotion of the classical tradition, particularly through its archival work and its support for

marginal and endangered traditions that would not survive in the commercial marketplace. But it has also been subject to the characteristic pathologies of state cultural institutions: bureaucratic conservatism, political influence on aesthetic judgements, the privileging of the institutionally respectable over the genuinely experimental, and the tendency to freeze a living tradition into a heritage object rather than supporting its continued evolution.

11.3 Commodification and Its Discontents

The commodification of Hindustani music — its transformation from a practice embedded in specific social relationships and contexts into a product that can be packaged, priced, and sold in the marketplace — began with the gramophone industry in the early twentieth century and has been accelerated by every subsequent development in the music industry. The streaming economy represents the most recent and in some respects the most radical stage of this commodification process: a world in which the performance of a raga that represents decades of disciplined human cultivation can be accessed for fractions of a cent, in which the economic value of a musical performance is determined by the number of streams it generates rather than by any assessment of its artistic quality.

The responses of the classical music world to commodification have been divided. Some musicians and institutions have embraced the market with enthusiasm, seeking to position classical music as a premium cultural product with strong brand associations — spiritual depth, authentic tradition, cultural prestige — that can command premium prices in a niche market of affluent connoisseurs. Others have maintained a principled resistance to market logic, arguing that the social relations of the marketplace are fundamentally incompatible with the values of the classical tradition and that the integrity of the art depends on maintaining non-commercial contexts — the baithak, the gurukul, the Sufi dargah — in which music is experienced as a gift rather than a commodity.

11.4 Archiving the Living Tradition

The preservation of Hindustani musical knowledge is a task of considerable complexity, given the oral character of the tradition's most important knowledge and the ephemeral character of live performance. Archival institutions — the Sangeet Natak Akademi, the National Centre for the Performing Arts in Mumbai, the ITC Sangeet Research Academy in Kolkata, and a growing number of private digital archives — have made significant contributions to the preservation of recordings, manuscripts, and documentary materials. The digitisation of early gramophone recordings has rescued irreplaceable documents of the tradition from physical deterioration. Oral

history projects have captured the memories and knowledge of musicians whose gharana traditions would otherwise have disappeared with them.

Yet the most important archival challenge facing Hindustani music cannot be addressed through the collection and digitisation of recordings, however valuable these activities are. The most important musical knowledge of the tradition

— the precise intonational character of a raga, the subtle rhythmic sensitivity of a great tabla player, the quality of a master vocalist's meend — cannot be fully captured in any recording medium. It exists in living bodies trained through decades of disciplined practice, and it can only be transmitted to new bodies through the living pedagogical relationship. The most important archive, in this sense, is not a library or a digital database but a community of living practitioners, and the most important archival activity is not digitisation but the support and sustaining of the conditions in which the tradition's highest knowledge can continue to be transmitted from generation to generation.

11.5 UNESCO Intangible Heritage and the Limits of International Recognition

The UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (2003) provides an international framework for the recognition and protection of living cultural traditions, and several elements of the Hindustani tradition — including specific regional musical forms such as the Vedic chanting tradition and the Ramman festival in Uttarakhand — have received recognition under its provisions. The possible application of UNESCO intangible heritage frameworks to Hindustani classical music as a whole raises important questions about the relationship between international recognition and the vitality of the tradition.

The scholarly literature on intangible heritage has identified a persistent tension between the goal of safeguarding living traditions and the effect of heritage designation in freezing them. The act of formally designating a practice as heritage — identifying specific forms, practitioners, and institutional contexts as the authentic bearers of the tradition

— tends to fix the tradition at a particular historical moment, creating a normative template against which subsequent developments are evaluated as authentic or inauthentic. For a tradition as dynamically evolving as Hindustani music, this freezing effect poses a significant risk: the reification of a particular historical style as "authentic" classical music at the expense of the ongoing creative evolution that has always been the condition of the tradition's vitality.

11.6 Cultural Diplomacy and Soft Power

Classical music has been a consistent instrument of Indian cultural diplomacy since independence. The Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) has sponsored tours and performances by leading classical musicians in dozens of countries, using the prestige of the tradition to advance Indian soft power in international contexts. Ravi Shankar's early international career was substantially supported by ICCR patronage, and the pattern he established — the classical musician as ambassador of Indian civilisation — has continued in various forms to the present day.

The use of classical music in cultural diplomacy creates specific tensions for the tradition. The requirements of diplomatic presentation — the need to communicate with non-specialist international audiences, to fit within the temporal constraints of diplomatic events, to represent India as a coherent national culture — conflict with the tradition's own aesthetic values of depth, complexity, and the refusal of easy communication. Musicians who have participated extensively in ICCR-sponsored international tours frequently describe the tension between performing as national cultural ambassadors and performing as practitioners of a demanding artistic tradition that makes its own claims on performer and audience alike. Navigating this tension is one of the characteristic challenges of the contemporary Indian classical musician's international career, and its management has important consequences for the kind of music that is presented to international audiences as representative of the tradition.

APPENDIX D: SELECTED BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES ON MAJOR MUSICIANS CITED

The following biographical notes provide contextual information on major musicians cited in the thesis whose life histories are relevant to the analytical arguments presented. The notes are arranged alphabetically by the musician's most commonly used name. Dates are given where reliably established; biographical information draws on a combination of published scholarly sources, archival materials, and oral tradition.

Alladiya Khan, Ustad (1855–1946)

Founder of the Jaipur-Atrauli gharana, Alladiya Khan is considered one of the supreme masters of Hindustani vocal music and a figure of extraordinary stylistic individuality. Born in Jaipur into a family of court musicians, he received training in multiple gharana traditions before developing the distinctive Jaipur style: harmonically unusual, rhythmically complex, emotionally introspective, and oriented towards rare and demanding ragas. He served as court musician to the

Baroda state for many years before settling in Mumbai in his final decades, where he attracted students from across India. His willingness to teach Kesarbai Kerkar to the highest level of the tradition, at a time when this was highly unusual for a female student, makes him a significant figure in the gendered history of the classical tradition.

Bade Ghulam Ali Khan, Ustad (1902–1968)

The greatest vocalist of the Patiala gharana and one of the most beloved classical singers of the twentieth century. Born in Kasur (now Pakistan) into a family of hereditary musicians, Bade Ghulam Ali Khan possessed a voice of extraordinary range, beauty, and power, combined with an improvisational genius and musical personality that commanded the attention and affection of the widest possible range of audiences. His recordings — both classical and semi-classical — achieved commercial success on a scale unusual for a classical musician, and his influence on subsequent generations of vocalists across the tradition has been immense. Following Partition in 1947, he chose to remain in India rather than move to Pakistan, a decision that was both personally significant and historically consequential for the continuity of the Patiala tradition in the Indian subcontinent.

Bhimsen Joshi, Pandit (1922–2011)

Widely regarded as the most beloved classical vocalist of the second half of the twentieth century, Pandit Bhimsen Joshi was the supreme representative of the Kirana gharana tradition and a musician whose combination of technical mastery, emotional depth, and communicative power made him accessible and beloved to audiences far beyond the circle of classical connoisseurs. Born in Gadag, Karnataka, he ran away from home as a child in search of a musical guru, eventually becoming a disciple of Sawai Gandharva of the Kirana tradition. His long career — spanning six decades of concert performance, recording, and teaching — produced a body of work that is considered among the most important in the history of the tradition. His annual Sawai Gandharva Bhimsen Festival in Pune, which he founded in honour of his guru, has become the most important classical music festival in India and a living institution of the tradition he embodied.

Fayyaz Khan, Ustad (1886–1950)

The defining master of the Agra gharana in the twentieth century, Ustad Fayyaz Khan was celebrated for his commanding, weighty voice, his deep and authoritative elaboration of raga, and the unmistakable personality that he brought to everything he performed. Trained in the strict

Agra tradition by his maternal grandfather and uncle, he served as court musician to the Baroda state for many years before achieving national recognition as one of the greatest vocalists of his generation. His recordings — particularly of Raga Darbari Kanada, with which the Agra gharana is most closely associated — remain reference documents for the tradition. His social position as a Muslim hereditary musician of the highest artistic distinction, at a time when the social respectability of such musicians was being actively contested, makes him a significant figure in the social as well as musical history of the tradition.

Kesarbai Kerkar (1892–1977)

The first woman to be universally acknowledged as a classical vocalist of the first rank, Kesarbai Kerkar was a disciple of Ustad Alladiya Khan of the Jaipur-Atrauli gharana whose mastery of the demanding Jaipur style established her as one of the great vocalists of the twentieth century. Born in Goa into a family without a hereditary musical background, she pursued her musical training with extraordinary determination, eventually winning the trust and complete transmission of the Jaipur tradition from a guru who was initially reluctant to teach a woman at the highest level. Her recordings, particularly of the complex ragas favoured by the Jaipur tradition, are considered among the most important documents of the tradition. One of her recordings was included on the Voyager Golden Record in 1977, making her music potentially the first Hindustani classical performance to travel beyond the solar system — a detail that has taken on symbolic resonance in discussions of the tradition's universal dimensions.

Shankar, Ravi (1920–2012)

The most internationally celebrated Indian classical musician of the twentieth century, Ravi Shankar began his performing career as a dancer with the troupe of his elder brother Uday Shankar before dedicating himself entirely to the sitar under the demanding tutelage of Allaudin Khan of the Senia-Maihar gharana in Maihar, with whom he lived and studied for several years in a rigorous traditional gurukul arrangement. His subsequent career combined the highest levels of classical artistry with an extraordinary gift for cross-cultural communication and international promotion. His collaborations with Yehudi Menuhin, his influence on the Beatles, and his long association with the Monterey and Woodstock festivals made him the primary figure through whom Western audiences encountered Indian classical music. His compositions for sitar and orchestra and his numerous fusion experiments have been variously assessed as creative achievements and as concessions to international taste; his purely classical performances, captured in recordings from the 1960s and 1970s, are universally regarded as among the great documents of the Hindustani instrumental tradition.

Tansen (c. 1506–1589)

The most mythologised figure in the history of Hindustani music, Tansen is celebrated as both the greatest musician who ever lived and the founding ancestor of the tradition as we know it. Born Ram Tanu Pandey in Gwalior, he converted to Islam and became a disciple of the Sufi saint Muhammad Ghaus of Gwalior before entering the service of the Mughal Emperor Akbar as one of his navratnas (nine gems). The legends surrounding him — that his singing could kindle fires and bring rain — represent in mythological form the tradition's conviction of music's cosmological power. His historical significance lies partly in his musical achievements — he is credited with composing many of the most important ragas in the classical repertoire — and partly in his role as the ancestor through whom several of the major gharanas trace their lineage. His tomb in Gwalior, adjacent to that of his Sufi mentor, is the site of the annual Tansen Samaroh, one of the most important classical music festivals in India, whose venue in the garden of the two tombs — a Hindu musician converted to Islam and buried beside his Sufi master — embodies the composite cultural character of the tradition he represents.

CHAPTER NINE: MUSIC EDUCATION, PEDAGOGY, AND CULTURAL PRESERVATION

9.1 Institutionalisation of Music Education

The emergence of institutional music education transformed the traditional pathways through which Hindustani Classical Music was transmitted. Universities, conservatories, and cultural academies created a framework in which music could be studied systematically outside hereditary communities while broadening access for students from diverse backgrounds.

The evolving nature of musical practice demonstrates the adaptability of Hindustani Classical Music within contemporary society and global cultural exchange.

9.2 Digital Learning and Online Pedagogy

The rise of online learning platforms and digital classrooms has dramatically reshaped music pedagogy in the twenty-first century. Students across the globe now participate in remote guru-shishya interactions through video conferencing and archived recordings.

The evolving nature of musical practice demonstrates the adaptability of Hindustani Classical Music within contemporary society and global cultural exchange.

9.3 Preservation of Rare Ragas and Compositions

Archival institutions and cultural organisations play a significant role in preserving endangered ragas and rare bandishes. Digitisation projects ensure that historically important performances remain accessible for future generations.

The evolving nature of musical practice demonstrates the adaptability of Hindustani Classical Music within contemporary society and global cultural exchange.

CHAPTER TEN: HINDUSTANI MUSIC AND THERAPEUTIC PRACTICES

10.1 Music and Emotional Healing

Hindustani Classical Music has long been associated with emotional regulation and psychological well-being. The meditative structure of ragas is believed to influence mental states and emotional balance.

The evolving nature of musical practice demonstrates the adaptability of Hindustani Classical Music within contemporary society and global cultural exchange.

10.2 Raga Therapy and Modern Research

Contemporary interdisciplinary studies in neuroscience and psychology have explored the therapeutic potential of raga-based listening practices in stress management and emotional healing.

The evolving nature of musical practice demonstrates the adaptability of Hindustani Classical Music within contemporary society and global cultural exchange.

10.3 Spirituality and Sonic Consciousness

The philosophical concept of Nada Brahman continues to influence therapeutic understandings of sound in Indian traditions, linking music with spiritual awareness and consciousness.

The evolving nature of musical practice demonstrates the adaptability of Hindustani Classical Music within contemporary society and global cultural exchange.

CHAPTER ELEVEN: FUTURE DIRECTIONS AND CULTURAL SUSTAINABILITY

11.1 The Future of the Gharana System

The gharana system continues to evolve in response to globalisation, migration, and technological change while retaining its core principles of lineage and identity.

The evolving nature of musical practice demonstrates the adaptability of Hindustani Classical Music within contemporary society and global cultural exchange.

11.2 Government Policy and Cultural Heritage

Government institutions and cultural academies remain central to the preservation of India's musical heritage through fellowships, scholarships, and festival sponsorships.

The evolving nature of musical practice demonstrates the adaptability of Hindustani Classical Music within contemporary society and global cultural exchange.

11.3 Conclusion: The Enduring Resonance of Hindustani Music

Despite social and technological transformations, Hindustani Classical Music continues to endure as a living tradition whose resilience lies in its adaptability and cultural depth.

The evolving nature of musical practice demonstrates the adaptability of Hindustani Classical Music within contemporary society and global cultural exchange.

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY IN INDIAN MUSIC

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This book presents an in-depth academic exploration of Indian music—its theoretical foundations, performance traditions, historical evolution, and contemporary relevance. Rooted in rigorous research and enriched by interdisciplinary perspectives, it contributes to the global understanding of one of the world's most profound musical traditions.

HIGHLIGHTS

- In-depth study of Raga, Tala and Shruti within classical frameworks
- Exploration of Hindustani and Carnatic performance practices
- Historical development of instruments, texts, notation and oral traditions
- Contemporary issues and global perspectives in Indian music
- Research methodologies and digital approaches to musicology
- Scholarly insights for future preservation and innovation

Indian music is not merely heard, it is experienced, lived, and passed on—a timeless tradition that resonates across generations.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Passionate about the depth and diversity of Indian music, Raju Raval brings together scholarly rigor and artistic insight to bridge tradition and modernity. His research contributes to preserving, understanding and reimagining Indian music for future generations.